

A 30-minute walk may reduce blood pressure by as much as medication

Just 30 minutes of exercise every morning may be as effective as medication at lowering blood pressure for the rest of the day. A study found that a short burst of treadmill walking each morning had long-lasting effects, and there were further benefits from additional short walks later in the day.

In experiments, 35 women and 32 men aged between 55 and 80 followed three different daily plans, in a random order, with at least six days between each one.

The first plan consisted of uninterrupted sitting for 8 hours, while the second consisted of 1 hour of sitting before 30 minutes of walking on a treadmill at moderate intensity, followed by 6.5 hours of sitting down. The final plan was 1 hour of sitting before 30 minutes of treadmill walking, followed by 6.5 hours of sitting, which was interrupted every 30 minutes with 3 minutes of walking at a light intensity.

The study was conducted in a laboratory to standardise the results, and men and women ate the same meals the evening before the study and during the day.

Michael Wheeler at the University of Western Australia in Perth and his colleagues found that blood pressure was lower in men and women who took part in the exercise plans, compared with when they didn't exercise.

The effect was especially seen with systolic blood pressure, which measures pressure in blood vessels when the heart beats and is a stronger predictor of heart problems such as heart attacks than diastolic blood pressure, which measures the pressure in blood vessels when the heart rests between beats.

Women also saw extra benefits if they added in the short 3-minute walks throughout the day, but the effect was smaller for men.

The team doesn't know why there was a gender difference, but thinks it may be due to varying adrenaline responses to exercise and the fact that all women in the study were post-menopausal and therefore at higher risk of cardiovascular disease.

"For both men and women, the magnitude of reduction in average systolic blood pressure following exercise and breaks in sitting approached what might be expected from anti-hypertensive medication in this population to reduce the risk of death from heart disease and stroke," says Wheeler.

The study supports a huge body of evidence that shows regular physical activity can help lower your blood pressure and help reduce your risk of heart attacks and strokes, says Chris Allen at the British Heart Foundation. "It can also give both your body and mind a boost, which is why 30 minutes of activity in the morning is a great way to set yourself up for the day," he says.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2194460-a-30-minute-walk-may-reduce-blood-pressure-by-as-much-as-medication/>

