

Walking Cuts Blood Pressure

A Little Walking Cuts Blood Pressure Study Shows Even Short Walks Can Improve Your Health

By [Jennifer Warner](#)

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Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](#)

Aug. 15, 2007 -- Thirty minutes of walking three times a week may be enough to help lower blood pressure and start you on the path to better health.

A new study shows that even a little bit of weekly exercise is enough to lower blood pressure and improve overall fitness. The results showed that 30 minutes of walking three times a week -- even if it was broken into 10-minute walks throughout the day -- was enough to have a healthy effect on blood pressure as well as measurements around the waist and hip.

National guidelines recommend that people exercise at least 30 minutes a day on most days of the week to maintain optimum health. But few people achieve that goal, citing lack of time as the biggest obstacle.

Researchers say these results may help motivate people to fit in even a little exercise here and there to benefit their health.

Even a Little Exercise Helps

In the study, published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, researchers invited 106 healthy but sedentary civil servants to take part in an exercise program for 12 weeks. About a third were told to briskly walk for 30 minutes, five days a week. Another third were told to briskly walk for 30 minutes a day, three days a week; the remaining third were told not to change their sedentary lifestyle at all.

The participants wore pedometers to monitor their walking, and researchers measured their blood pressure, blood cholesterol, weight, hip and waist size, and overall fitness before and after the study.

The results showed systolic (the top number) blood pressure dropped -- and waist and hip measurements shrunk significantly -- in both the three-day-a-week and five-day-a-week exercise groups.

Systolic blood pressure dropped by 5 points among those who exercised three days a week and by 6 points among those who exercised five days a week.

Waist and hip measurements fell by 2.6 centimeters and 2.4 centimeters respectively among the three-day-a-week exercisers and by 2.5 centimeters and 2.2 centimeters among the five-day-a-week exercise group.

No changes were found in the sedentary group.

Researcher Mark A. Tully of Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, says a decrease of a few points in blood pressure and a few centimeters in the waist and hips is enough to significantly reduce the risk of death due to heart disease. They say the study shows even moderate exercise below the recommended levels can still have benefits.

SOURCES: Tully, M. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, Aug. 13, 2007; vol 61: pp 778-783. News release, *BMJ*.

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