



## Level of Activity Key to Cutting Stroke Risk

### Moderate to High Levels of Physical Activity Linked to Lower Risk of Stroke

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Aug. 4, 2005 -- Need a nudge to make physical activity a habit? Unsure about how much exercise is enough?

A new study from Finland may help. The findings:

- Being moderately to highly active during leisure time can slash stroke risk.
- You've got to move -- on a regular basis -- to get the maximum protection against the risk of stroke.

This means vigorous activity (like running, swimming, or heavy gardening) for more than three hours a week. Moderate levels of leisure-time activity like walking or biking to work also helps, write the researchers.

They included Gang Hu, MD, PhD, of the National Public Health Institute in Helsinki, Finland. The report appears in *Stroke*.

#### How Active Are You?

The study included more than 47,000 Finns aged 25-64. At the study's start, none had had a stroke, cancer, or coronary heart disease.

Participants rated their activity level. You could do the same, using the study's standards:

- Low: Almost completely inactive (reading, watching TV, or minor physical activity).
- Moderate: Some physical activity for more than four hours per week of light gardening, walking, or cycling (but not walking or biking to work).
- High: Vigorous physical activity for more than three hours per week (such as running, swimming, heavy gardening, competitive sports).

They also noted how they got to work each day and how active their jobs were.

## Higher Activity Level, Fewer Strokes

Over 19 years, the group had 2,863 strokes. Stroke risk was 26% lower in highly active participants and 14% lower for those reporting moderate activity during leisure time.

People who walked or biked to work also had a lower risk of strokes from blood clots. More than eight out of 10 strokes are caused by blood clots, according to the American Stroke Association.

## Study's Details

The researchers took other factors into account (including smoking, alcohol use, social and economic status, and medical history).

"Using a questionnaire to assess habitual physical exercise is always crude and imprecise. We do not have data on possible changes in physical activity during follow-up," they write.

Still, any overblown activity reports probably led them to underestimate the link between stroke and activity, the researchers note.

See your doctor before starting an exercise program. Get emergency medical help at any sign of stroke. Medicines can make a big difference in the outcome, but some stroke drugs must be given within a few hours after stroke symptoms start.

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SOURCES: Hu, G. *Stroke*, Aug. 4, 2005; online edition. American Stroke Association: "What Are the Types of Stroke?" News release, American Stroke Association.

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