

Football can make your heart ten years younger

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If you suffer from high blood pressure or type 2 diabetes, playing football could render blood pressure drugs unnecessary and make your heart younger and stronger, according to new research.

Football could be something of a miracle treatment for patients who suffer from high blood pressure or type 2 diabetes.

That's the conclusion of new research from the University of Copenhagen where both groups of patients played football for an hour twice a week over a period of six months.

Their blood pressure, fitness rating, and percentage of body fat were measured regularly throughout the study.

"We were impressed that blood pressure decreased so significantly in both groups. In three out of four patients suffering from high blood pressure, the blood pressure was normalised, and some even went on to drop their medicine," say professor Jens Bangsbo and assistant professor Peter Krarup of the Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports at the University of Copenhagen.

They are the authors of five studies presented at the Copenhagen Centre for Team Sport and Health and recently published in the scientific journal *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*.

Football lowers the blood pressure

The patients who participated in the study and suffered from high blood pressure were between the ages of 30 and 55 years. They were divided into two groups.

- A group that was to play football twice.
- A group that had their blood pressure measured by a doctor and received advice on nutrition and exercise.

"The football group had a drop in blood pressure that was twice as large as that of the group that saw a doctor," says Krarup.

Unlike the control group, the football group also saw a drop in body fat percentage, a higher fitness rating and improved heart function -- all of which add up to a lowered risk of cardiovascular disease, says Krarup.

Diabetics get a younger heart

According to Bangsbo, a game of football is a good idea if you're struggling with high blood pressure -- but it has even more advantages if you suffer from type 2 diabetes.

“In the diabetes group we measured their heart function and it was significantly improved,” he says.

In fact, it was their hearts became 10 years younger in six months, says Bangsbo. “With just one hour of training a week.”

Like the high blood pressure group, the diabetes group also achieved a higher fitness rating and a drop in the percentage of body fat.

In the wake of the studies, the Copenhagen Centre for Team Sport and Health has entered a collaborative partnership with the Danish Football Association DBU, the Danish Heart Foundation and the Danish Diabetes Association with the purpose of making it possible for all patient groups to play football at their local club at a level where everyone can keep up.

Play your way to a healthy old body

Even though football is physically demanding it can still benefit older generations who might not be getting that much exercise.

In a 12-month study, a group of untrained men between the ages of 65 and 75 years played two to three hours of football every week. The researchers found that the football practice had significant positive effects on bone strength, which increased by 5.4 per cent over the course of 12 months -- an impressive increase, according to Peter Krstrup.

“A large part of bone strength is established in the patient’s youth, and many think that training has a limited effect when the patient is ageing,” he says. “But our study clearly shows that it’s possible to achieve a significant improvement of bone health by being active in a way that varies the strain on the bones.”

In addition to stronger bones, the researchers also found a 15 per cent improvement in fitness ratings and an improvement of muscle function of more than 30 per cent over the course of four months.

“There’s a lot of focus on training for the elderly because it’s possible to keep up a healthy life for longer with physical exercise. Now we’ve found another proven good option in football,” says Krstrup.

Other sports need to be examined

A game of football sounds like a miracle cure -- but won’t any other type of sport have the same effect?

“The Copenhagen Centre for Team Sport and Health is also examining other kinds of team sports and their effect on health, such as floor ball, basketball and handball. We’ve also found great health benefits in middle-aged women who play floor ball, but we’ve yet to establish the effects of the other team sports,” says Bangsbo.

Even though there’s still a need for concrete studies of the different types of sport, professor Thorsten Ingemann Hansen of the Sport Science at the Department of Public Health at Aarhus University, thinks it’s interesting that sports can be used as a treatment.

“It’s a new and exciting approach to use sport as a treatment. Previously patients have had to do weight training, circuit training and that sort of thing, but with football there’s social benefits as well,” says Hansen who hasn’t been involved in the new studies.

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 [Do you suffer from high blood pressure or type 2 diabetes? New research suggests you should play football then ? it'll make your heart healthier. \(Photo: Shutterstock\)](#) [9]

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Fact box

The studies were carried out in collaboration with the international Federation of Association Football, FIFA.

During the world cup in Brazil several scientific articles will be published on the effects of football on health.

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