

Controlling High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (hypertension) is often called the silent killer. This is because many people who have it, don't know it. It can be very dangerous. High blood pressure can raise your risk of heart attack, stroke, heart disease, and heart failure. Controlling your blood pressure can lower your risk of these problems. It's important to check your blood pressure regularly. It can save your life.

Blood pressure measurements are given as 2 numbers. **Systolic** blood pressure is the upper number. This is the pressure when the heart contracts. **Diastolic** blood pressure is the lower number. This is the pressure when the heart relaxes between beats.

Blood pressure is grouped like this:

- **Normal blood pressure.** This is systolic of less than 120 and diastolic of less than 80 (120/80).
- **Elevated blood pressure.** This is systolic of 120 to 129 **and** diastolic less than 80.
- **Stage 1 high blood pressure.** This is systolic of 130 to 139 **or** diastolic between 80 to 89.
- **Stage 2 high blood pressure.** This is systolic of 140 or higher **or** diastolic of 90 or higher.

A heart-healthy lifestyle can help you control your blood pressure without medicines. Below are some things you can do to have a heart-healthy lifestyle.



Eat heart-healthy foods

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- Choose low-salt, low-fat foods. Limit your sodium to 2,300 mg per day or the amount advised by your healthcare provider.
 - Limit canned, dried, cured, packaged, and fast foods. These can contain a lot of salt.
 - Eat 8 to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
 - Choose lean meats, fish, or chicken.
 - Eat whole-grain pasta, brown rice, and beans.
 - Eat 2 to 3 servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy products.
 - Ask your doctor about the DASH eating plan. This plan helps reduce blood pressure.
 - When you go to a restaurant, ask that your meal be made with no added salt.

Stay at a healthy weight

- Ask your healthcare provider how many calories to eat a day. Then stick to that number.
- Ask your provider what weight range is healthiest for you. If you are overweight, a weight loss of only 3% to 5% of your body weight can help lower blood pressure. A good weight loss goal is to lose 10% of your body weight in a year.
- Limit snacks and sweets.
- Get regular exercise.

Get more active

- Find activities you enjoy. They can be done alone or with friends or family. Try bicycling, dancing, walking, or jogging.
- Park farther away from building entrances to walk more.
- Use stairs instead of the elevator.
- When you can, walk or bike instead of driving.
- Rake leaves, garden, or do household repairs.
- Be active at a moderate to vigorous level of physical activity for at least 30 minutes a day for at least 5 days a week.

Manage stress

- Make time to relax and enjoy life. Find time to laugh.
- Talk about your concerns with your loved ones and your healthcare provider.
- Visit with family and friends, and keep up with hobbies.

Limit alcohol and quit smoking

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- Men should have no more than 2 drinks per day.
 - Women should have no more than 1 drink per day.
 - If you smoke, make a plan to stop. Talk with your healthcare provider for help. Smoking greatly raises your risk for heart disease and stroke. Ask your provider about stop-smoking programs and other support.

Blood pressure medicines

If your lifestyle changes aren't enough, your healthcare provider may prescribe high blood pressure medicine. Take all medicines as prescribed. If you have any questions about your medicines, ask your provider before stopping or changing them.

How daily issues affect your health

Many things in your daily life impact your health. This can include transportation, money problems, housing, access to food, and child care. If you can't get to medical appointments, you may not receive the care you need. When money is tight, it may be difficult to pay for medicines. And living far from a grocery store can make it hard to buy healthy food.

If you have concerns in any of these or other areas, talk with your healthcare team. They may know of local resources to assist you. Or they may have a staff person who can help.