

Controlling Your Blood Pressure When You Have Heart Disease

Many people with heart disease have high blood pressure.

“I just developed high blood pressure in the last four or five years.”

Controlling it is one of the best things you can do to prevent having another heart attack or stroke.

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of your arteries.

When you have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, the increased pressure of the blood flow through your arteries can damage your vessel walls.

The blood vessels lose their elasticity and harden. Your heart has to pump harder to move blood through your body.

This can lead to your heart becoming enlarged as the main pumping chamber has to work harder to pump blood.

Blood pressure readings are made up of two numbers. The top number, systolic, measures blood pressure when the heart pumps.

The bottom number, diastolic, measures blood pressure when your heart is at rest.

Blood pressure is not well controlled if the top number (systolic) is 130 or higher, or the bottom number (diastolic) is 80 or higher.

Not only is high blood pressure dangerous for your heart, but it is also the number one risk factor for stroke.

Most people who have cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure take medication to reach, and stay at, a healthy level. In fact, a lot of these people take more than one medication for their high blood pressure.

It is recommended that patients take all medications as directed.

Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about the side effects and what to do if you experience them.

Do not stop taking any of your medication without first contacting your healthcare provider.

Have your blood pressure checked on a regular basis. Most people use a home blood pressure monitor to make sure their treatment plan is working.

Bring your home blood pressure monitor to the office to have it checked for accuracy. Sometimes there are differences between a home monitor and clinic machine.

Your blood pressure might change between readings. This may be normal.

There is a higher risk for heart attack and stroke if blood pressure stays at a high, dangerous level.

If you notice a pattern of high home blood pressure readings, contact your healthcare provider right away.

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Healthy lifestyle changes like quitting smoking, choosing healthy, low-sodium foods, exercising regularly, managing your weight, limiting the amount of alcohol you drink and controlling stress and anger also go a long way in managing high blood pressure.

The DASH diet, which stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, can help you make healthy food choices that also limit your amount of sodium. Check out the DASH diet plan at www.nhlbi.nih.gov for tips to help you reach your blood pressure goal.

People who have high blood pressure should keep the sodium in the foods they eat to 1,500 mg per day.

Calculating this is easy; 1500 mgs = 1.5 grams of sodium. Some soups have 800mg = almost a gram of sodium in one serving!

Even cutting back 1,000 mg a day can help improve your blood pressure and heart health.

Everyone with high blood pressure should aim to get at least 90 to 150 minutes of aerobic and/or resistance exercises per week.

Walking, jogging, swimming, and biking are all good examples of aerobic activities.

If you do drink alcohol, do so in moderation. This means no more than 2 drinks a day for men, and no more than one drink a day for women. A drink is 5 oz. of wine, 12 oz. of beer, or 1.5 oz. of liquor.

Follow up regularly with your health care team to ensure that you maintain blood pressure control and minimize side effects from your medications.

Your health care team can also help you create a plan to work on these healthier behaviors for better blood pressure management.

“The combination of medication, diet and exercise has kept my blood pressure under control.”

“I’m only on one blood pressure medication, and in addition, that blood pressure medication is only half the dosage of what it was. So I’m really happy about that.”