
High Blood Pressure

When your heart beats, it pumps blood around your body to deliver oxygen. As the heart pumps the blood forward, the blood also pushes against the sides of the blood vessels. That force pushing on your blood vessels is your blood pressure.

If your blood pressure is too high, that pushing causes your arteries (and heart) to wear out faster and this may lead to a heart attack, kidney failure or a stroke. High blood pressure is known as hypertension. Diet and exercise are a great way for you to lower your blood pressure without medication. Some people need to use diet, exercise, and medication to lower their blood pressure.

Blood Pressure Category	SYSTOLIC mmHG (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mmHG (lower number)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120-129	and	Less than 80
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage I	130-139	or	80-89
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage II	140 or higher	or	90 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis	Higher than 180	and/or	Higher than 120

Lifestyle changes that may help lower your blood pressure:

Lose weight if you are overweight:

- Weight loss of 5-10% of body weight for people who are overweight can help improve blood pressure. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds then aim to lose 10-20 pounds.

Physical activity:

- 40 minutes of moderate activity 3 to 4 days per week. Start slow and build up. Check with your doctor about the activity level that is right for you.
- Generally, with “moderate” activity, you would be breathing heavily but still able to carry on a short conversation.

Limit sodium:

- Even if you are taking medication for your blood pressure, you should limit how much sodium you eat or drink.
- People with high blood pressure should have less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day.

Tip: limit the salt you add at the table, read food labels, and eat fewer ultra-processed foods.

Try the DASH Diet (stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension):

- This diet includes a variety of fruits and vegetables, whole grain foods, lean meats, nuts, and low-fat dairy products.
- The DASH diet has been shown to effectively lower blood pressure.

Limit alcohol and Quit smoking:

- Drinking more than 2 alcoholic drinks per day for men (or 1 for women) can raise blood pressure, and so can smoking.

Why does eating too much sodium raise my blood pressure? Why is that bad?

Eating too much sodium makes your body hold on to water. When our bodies have too much water, it goes into the blood. Over time the tubes that hold your blood (arteries & veins) will become overstretched or worn. (Think of how fragile an overfilled balloon is).

Having a higher blood pressure puts stress on the veins and arteries that hold your blood and makes your heart work harder to pump blood to the body. Over time, the damage to your arteries and heart can lead to a stroke or a heart attack.

How does exercise help?

Regular physical activity makes your heart stronger and better at moving blood. When your heart doesn't have to push blood as forcefully through the tubes, this lowers blood pressure. Becoming more active can lower your systolic blood pressure — the top number in a blood pressure reading — by an average of 4 to 9 mm Hg. That's as good as some medications. For some people, getting regular exercise is enough to avoid taking blood pressure medication.