Blood pressure and your health



Understanding blood pressure

What is blood pressure?

When the heart pumps blood, the blood pushes against the walls of the arteries (blood vessels). Blood pressure measures how hard the blood pushes.

- Blood pressure is measured in 2 numbers:
  - The top number, called systolic (mm Hg), is the pressure when the heart beats to pump blood through arteries
  - The bottom number, called diastolic (mm Hg), is the pressure when the heart rests between beats
- Your blood pressure rises and falls during the day

What do your blood pressure numbers tell you?

Blood pressure is written as one number over another.

120
80

For example, *120 over 80* or *120/80*. Remember, the top number is the pressure when the heart beats. The bottom number is the pressure when the heart is at rest.

- The numbers tell you if your blood pressure is normal, elevated, or high

		Top Number	Bottom Number
Normal		Below 120	Below 80
Elevated		120 to 129	Below 80
High Also called *hypertension*	Stage 1	130 to 139	80 to 89
	Stage 2	140 and above	90 and above

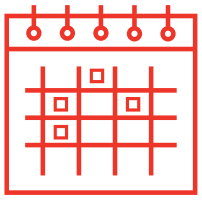
- If you have kidney disease, above 130/80 is high
- If you have diabetes, above 130/80 is high

Do I have high blood pressure?

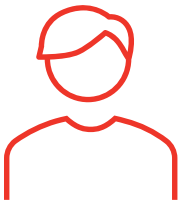
Usually, you do not know you have high blood pressure until your health care provider checks it. If your blood pressure stays high most of the time, you have high blood pressure. This is called *hypertension.*



About **1 of every 2** adults in the United States has high blood pressure



Have your blood pressure checked **at least once a year** or as directed by your health care provider



People with high blood pressure often have no symptoms

What health problems can high blood pressure cause?

With high blood pressure, your heart and arteries must work harder. Your kidneys also must work harder to remove waste from your blood.

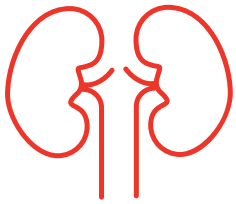
High blood pressure can increase your risk for:



Heart disease and heart attack



Stroke and dementia (problems with thinking and memory)



Chronic kidney disease



Am I at risk for high blood pressure?

Your risk for high blood pressure goes up with age. There are also other things that increase your risk. See the chart below to learn what those may be.

☑ Check anything that is true for you.

☐ I am overweight.	☐ I have family members with high blood pressure.
☐ I eat a lot of salty foods.	☐ I am an African American.
☐ I do not exercise.	☐ I eat a diet low in potassium.
☐ I am often stressed.	☐ I have kidney disease.
☐ I drink more than 1 or 2 servings of alcoholic beverages a day.	☐ I take medicines for certain conditions, including asthma or a cold.
☐ I smoke or chew tobacco.	☐ I take birth-control pills or hormone therapy.

Talk to your health care provider about your risks and what you can do to manage



Steps you can take

Try to keep your blood pressure as close to normal as possible. If your blood pressure is normal, taking the steps below may help you keep it normal.

If you have high blood pressure, working with your health care provider and taking these steps may help lower it:

- Watch your weight
- Eat foods low in salt
- Be active
- Reduce stress
- Limit alcohol intake
- Don't smoke

The next few pages show how you can try these lifestyle changes. Then, on pages 10 and 11, you can make your own action plan.

Some people can manage their blood pressure by taking these steps. Others may need to take medicine, too.



Watching your weight

Keeping a healthy weight comes from eating well and being active. Being overweight may raise blood pressure. Losing as little as 5 to 10 pounds can help lower your blood pressure. Make sure you talk with your health care provider about what is best for you.

Below are some things you can do to stay at a healthy weight:

- Eat several servings of foods that are high in fiber, like fruits and vegetables; eat whole-grain breads and cereals each day
- Choose lean proteins, such as skinless poultry and fish
- Eat beans and peas, such as kidney beans and split peas
- Cook with little or no fat, such as grilling food instead of frying it
- Eat fat-free or low-fat dairy foods each day

Reading food labels for healthier eating

Look for this label on most packaged and canned foods. It is always called *Nutrition Facts*. Choose foods that are low in fat and sodium.

Serving Size
The amount of food in 1 serving.

Total Fat
The total amount of fat in a serving. Choose foods with a low percent daily value (5% or lower).

Sodium
The amount of sodium (salt) in a serving. Choose foods with a low percent daily value (5% or lower).

Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container

Serving size	**2/3 cup (55g)**
Amount per serving	
Calories	**230**
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 8g	**10%**
Saturated Fat 1g	**5%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	**0%**
Sodium 160mg	**7%**
Total Carbohydrate 37g	**13%**
Dietary Fiber 4g	**14%**
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	**20%**
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 235mg	6%

Eating low-salt foods

Salt can raise your blood pressure. Many packaged foods are high in salt. These include canned, frozen, and snack foods.

- Try aiming for less than 1500 mg of salt (sodium) a day. That is less than a teaspoon
- When you eat salty foods, you get used to the salty taste
- If you eat less salt for a while, you may find that some foods, such as potato chips, taste too salty

Here are some ideas to help you eat less salt:

- Buy fresh foods
- Check the amount of sodium in canned, packaged, and frozen foods
- Cook with herbs and spices instead of salt. For example, try garlic powder in place of garlic salt
- Choose canned and packaged foods that say *low sodium* or *no salt added*
- Put down the saltshaker



Try cutting back on salty foods, such as:

- Cheese
- Bread and rolls
- Bacon, hot dog, sausage, and cold cuts
- Pizza
- Chips, pretzels, and other salty snacks
- Canned soups
- Sandwiches
- Soy sauce, barbecue sauce, and steak sauce
- Olives and pickles
- Frozen dinners
- Condiments, such as ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise



Being active

Even 30 minutes of physical activity 5 days a week may help lower your blood pressure. It may also keep your weight down. Being active helps reduce stress and strengthen your heart.

- You may benefit from any activity that gets you moving
- Not all activities have to be structured exercises. However, if you enjoy that, you may look in your local newspaper to find low-cost exercise groups and classes at your level. You can also look at community centers, the Young Men's Christian Association, note boards at supermarkets, local high schools, and community colleges. Many local schools have tracks and pools for adult exercising

Ideas to help you be more active

- Climb the stairs rather than taking the elevator
- Walk rather than drive or park your vehicle farther away and walk
- Start a walking group with friends
- Walk the dog
- Go on family hikes or bike rides
- Swim or take a water exercise class
- Do chores:
  - Gardening
  - Rake leaves
  - Wash the car
  - Wash windows or floors



Talk with your health care provider before you start an exercise program. Ask if the program is safe for you.

Reducing stress

Stress may raise your blood pressure. It can also make you want to overeat or drink alcohol.

You may be thinking, "I can't control all the stress in my life." This may be true, but you can learn to manage your response to stress. Here are some ideas to help you reduce stress:

- Accept that there are things you can't control
- Try being more active each day by walking, stretching, or doing yoga
- Take a few minutes to relax and do something you enjoy



Limiting alcohol intake

Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. It can also make you gain weight. Try limiting how much alcohol you drink:

Women	No more than 1 drink a day (5 oz of wine)
Men	No more than 2 drinks a day (10 oz of wine)

Not smoking

Smoking and secondhand smoke may cause high blood pressure. Smoking can damage your blood vessels and increase your risk for heart disease. It also increases your risk for stroke.

Quitting smoking is not easy. But you can do it. Here are some ideas to help you:

- Set a date to quit. Tell everyone you are quitting
- Make a list of the places and events that make you want to smoke and that allow smoking and avoid them



Think about joining a quit-smoking program. To find one, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). Or visit www.smokefree.gov.

Making lifestyle changes

In this booklet, you read about 6 healthy lifestyle changes you can make to help manage your blood pressure:


Watching your weight


Reducing stress


Eating low-salt foods


Limiting alcohol intake


Being active


Not smoking

Now you are ready to make an action plan.

Sample action plan

Here is a sample of a completed action plan. You can make your own action plan on page 11.

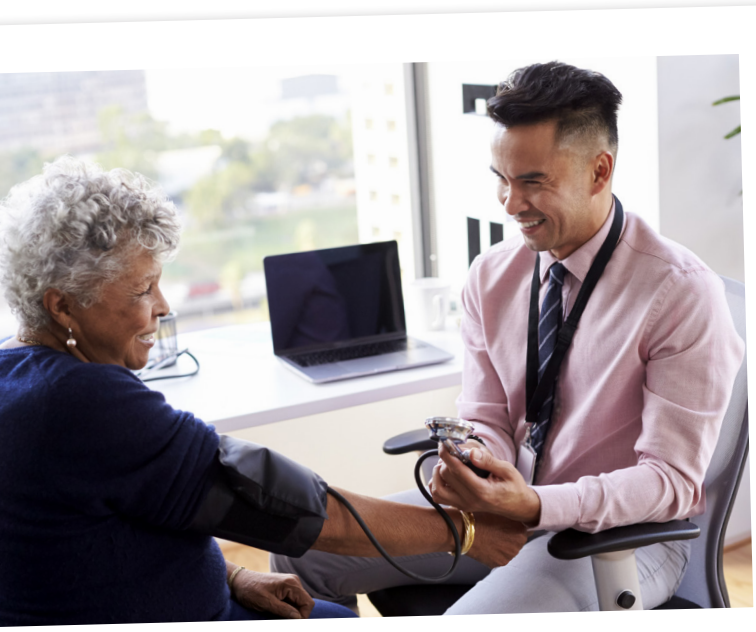
1. My blood pressure now	135/86
2. The lifestyle change I want to make to help lower my blood pressure	I will eat less salt
3. Things I will do to make this change	I will buy fresh foods. I will read food labels
4. How long I will try these things	8 weeks
5. How I will track my success	I will keep a track of the fresh fruits and vegetables I eat every day. I will look for foods with less than 140 mg of sodium in a serving
6. My blood pressure afterward	122/80
7. I will make an appointment with my health care provider to talk about my progress	My appointment is on: April / 12 / 1:00 PM Month Day Time

My action plan

Are you ready to make your own action plan? Follow the steps below.
You can use the chart below to write down your plan or use a notebook.

1. Measure your blood pressure before you start.
2. Choose a lifestyle change you want to make.
3. Choose 2 or 3 things you can do to help make the change.
4. Choose how many weeks you will work on these things.
5. Decide how you will track your success.
6. When you finish, measure your blood pressure again. Did it drop?
7. Make an appointment with your health care provider to talk about your progress.

1. My blood pressure now	
2. The lifestyle change I want to make to help lower my blood pressure	
3. Things I will do to make this change	
4. How long I will try these things	
5. How I will track my success	
6. My blood pressure afterward	
7. I will make an appointment with my health care provider to talk about my progress	My appointment is on: _____ / _____ / _____ Month Day Time



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