

HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



Your Heart and High Blood Pressure

One in 3 American adults has high blood pressure.¹ Many of them don't even know they do because you can't see or feel it. Having your blood pressure checked is the only way to know if it is too high.

Cholesterol and Heart Disease

Too much cholesterol can slow or stop blood flow:

- When the blood flow slows down a lot, you could have chest pain or high blood pressure.
- When the blood flow stops or is blocked, you could have a heart attack.
- When blood flow to the brain stops or is blocked, you could have a stroke.

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries and veins—the tubes that bring fresh blood to your heart and the rest of your body.

Blood pressure goes up and down during the day. When it stays up, that is high blood pressure. High blood pressure can lead to heart disease.

High blood pressure makes your heart work very hard. It also helps clog your arteries. If your arteries get clogged, blood can't get to your heart. That causes a heart attack. Here are some risk factors that can lead to a heart attack: being overweight, not enough exercise, diet high in cholesterol or fats, smoking, and high blood pressure.

Who's at Risk for Heart Problems?

If you have high blood pressure, you are a lot more likely to get heart disease than someone with normal blood pressure.

You are more likely to have high blood pressure if:

You are 60 years old or more²

You are overweight

Your mom, dad, or other family member has high blood pressure

What Do the Numbers Mean?

You measure blood pressure with two numbers—one that measures when your heart beats over the number that measures when your heart relaxes.

Talk to Your Doctor About Ways to Lower Your Blood Pressure.

Blood pressure of **140/90** is high.

Blood Pressure of **120/80**, or lower is normal.

Not treating high blood pressure is bad for your heart. If your pressure is normal, get it checked every two years or as often as your doctor tells you.³

Talk to your doctor if your blood pressure is more than 120/80. Talk to your doctor to find ways that you can lower your blood pressure.³



Your Heart and High Blood Pressure

What You Can Do to Lower Your Blood Pressure

Don't smoke. Smoking can make your heart beat faster and make your blood pressure rise.

Lose weight. The more you weigh, the higher your blood pressure is likely to be.

Exercise 30 minutes every day. You will help keep your heart, blood vessels (tubes that carry the blood in the body), and muscles healthy. This will also help keep your blood pressure low. Always talk to your doctor before you start a new exercise plan.

Lower your stress level. Stress may lead to high blood pressure. It can also lead to eating too much and weight gain. You can lower stress by having some “quiet” time, listening to music, and doing exercises.

Don't drink a lot of alcohol – no more than two drinks a day for a man and one drink a day for a woman.

Don't use too much salt. It makes your body hold onto water and raises the amount of blood in your system. This builds pressure. Use no more than one teaspoon of salt a day. To do this:

- Stay away from salty foods, such as soy sauce, chips, pickles, bacon, ham, and many canned and frozen foods.
- Buy no- or low-salt foods.
- Don't add salt at the table.

Eat lots of potassium (a mineral in many foods), which can help get rid of salt. Good foods to eat for potassium are cantaloupe, cooked tomatoes, bananas, baked potatoes, strawberries, and summer squash.

Eat lots of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products.

Don't eat a lot of fats. (fried foods, chips, full-fat dairy products, fatty meats, foods high in sugar)

If these changes don't lower your blood pressure enough, **talk to your doctor** about taking a blood pressure drug that is right for you. If you take a drug for high blood pressure, be sure to take it the way your doctor tells you to.

References

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3. American Heart Association. How Do I Know If I Have High Blood Pressure? Available at: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=219>. Accessed May 17, 2007.

