



# Controlling your blood pressure with healthy habits

## Taking your medication as prescribed

There are a variety of medications used to keep blood pressure at a healthy level. Often, individuals may need to take more than a single medication to effectively control their blood pressure. You should speak with your health care provider about which treatment plan is best for you. Your health care provider should give you instructions around how

to properly take your prescription(s). It is important to take your medication exactly as prescribed for the medication(s) to work effectively. Remember, you should never stop your current medication without talking to your health care provider or pharmacist first. Taking your medication as prescribed is a crucial part of proper blood pressure control.

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# Making healthy food choices

One of the best ways to lower blood pressure is by making heart-healthy eating choices:

## Decrease sodium

The American Heart Association recommends people aim to eat no more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day. This is less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon of salt. Extra sodium in the body tends to increase blood pressure because it increases the amount of fluid in the vessels. Foods that tend to have higher amounts of sodium include potato chips, pretzels, salted nuts, some canned foods, lunch meat, dried or cured meats, cheese, and much more. The use of non-sodium sources, such as spices and herbs, can also help to enhance the flavors of foods without affecting blood pressure.

## Switch to a healthier diet

Limit your consumption of saturated and trans fats. Common sources of saturated fats are desserts, hot dogs, breakfast sausages, bacon, cheeses, and creams. Foods that may contain trans fats include fried foods, baked goods, frozen pizza, crackers, stick margarines and other spreads. Try to eat a diet that places an emphasis on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, poultry, fish, and nuts. When cooking, use natural and unhydrogenated vegetable oils like canola, sunflower, safflower, or olive oil as often as possible.

## Limit alcohol intake

If you have high blood pressure, avoid alcohol or drink alcohol only in moderation. For healthy adults, that means up to one drink a day for women and up to two drinks a day for men.



# Exercise and stay active

Exercise is an excellent way to help keep blood pressure under control. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, recommends that adults get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, such as brisk walking or bicycling, every week. Keep your exercises fun by alternating between activities and ask your health care provider what exercises are safe for you before trying anything new.

# Healthy weight loss and maintenance

When someone is overweight, the heart must work harder than normal to support good oxygen and blood flow throughout the body, which causes high blood pressure. A weight loss goal of 5 to 10% of your initial body weight can help improve your blood pressure and overall health. Individuals that reach their goal should continue to practice healthy behaviors while working with their provider to keep their healthy weight.



## Reducing stress levels

Stressful situations can cause your blood pressure to rise temporarily, however, some researchers believe that continually stressful events can also lead to higher blood pressure in the long term. When you are stressed, your body produces hormones that increase your blood pressure and narrow your blood vessels. This has the potential to lead to an increased risk of heart attack or stroke. It is recommended that individuals practice strategies to healthily manage their stress which can include any of the following:

### Simplify your schedule

You can do this by prioritizing important tasks or activities while removing or pushing back activities that are not as important.

### Breathe to relax

Take deep and slow breaths when you feel stressed to try and relax.

### Exercise

Physical activity has been proven to be a natural and effective way to help with stress levels. If you have high blood pressure, make sure to check with your healthcare provider before starting any new exercises.

### Practice yoga or meditation

These activities can help you feel stronger and more relaxed. They may also be able to reduce systolic blood pressure by 5 mmHg or more.

### Get plenty of sleep

Not getting enough sleep can make you feel more irritable and make your problems seem worse than they are.

### Shift your perspective

It is important to acknowledge your feelings when dealing with problems, however, it is recommended to spend more time focusing on the solution. This can help you feel more confident and capable in solving problems and issues you may be facing.

## Quit smoking

Smoking tobacco products keeps the body in a constant state of inflammation, which keeps blood pressure high. There are various over-the-counter and prescription products that are available to help individuals give up smoking. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist about what products may be helpful for you.



## Using caution with over-the-counter products

It is important to note that some common over-the-counter drugs can cause an increase in blood pressure. Over-the-counter decongestants can narrow your blood vessels, which makes it harder for blood to flow through them. If you have high blood pressure, it is best to always check the label of your cold or allergy medication and do not take it if it has a decongestant. Always ask your pharmacist for support if you are unsure about an over-the-counter product and how it may affect your blood pressure.



# References

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