

Lowering Your Blood Pressure: Lifestyle Changes that Work

Blood pressure is the force that pushes blood through the arteries when the heart beats (systolic pressure) and when the heart is at rest (diastolic pressure). High blood pressure (or hypertension) is defined, in an adult, as a blood pressure measurement greater than or equal to 140 mm Hg systolic pressure and greater than or equal to 90 mm Hg diastolic pressure.

Your Blood Pressure (systolic/diastolic):

Goals for Adults with Hypertension (systolic/diastolic):

Adults younger than 60: $\leq 140/90$

Adults older than 60: 150/90

Do not wait until it is too late.

High blood pressure has no symptoms, but it can lead to serious health problems. Over time high blood pressure can damage the heart, blood vessels, eyes and other organs and increases your risk for having a heart attack or stroke.

Suggestions for Improvement

Step 1: Practice weight management.

Did you know that 1 pound (lb) of body fat equals 3500 calories? Cutting back just 500 calories a day can promote weight loss of 1 pound per week. What does 500 calories look like? One 20 fluid ounce bottle of regular soda plus one regular-sized candy bar equals approximately 500 calories. If you are overweight, just losing 5%-10% of your weight can significantly reduce your blood pressure!

Step 2: Do not smoke.

Your heart rate and blood pressure drop 10 minutes after you quit smoking. When you quit smoking, your risk of coronary heart disease is half that of someone who smokes one year after quitting.

Step 3: Exercise regularly.

Aim for 30 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity on most days of the week. Three 10-minute bouts of physical activity, such as walking, is equally as effective as one 30-minute bout.

Step 4: Limit alcohol consumption.

Men should limit alcohol consumption to no more than two drinks per day, and women should limit to one drink per day. One drink is equal to 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1 ounce of liquor.

Step 5: Make some dietary changes.

- **Limit your salt intake.**
 - Avoid foods with more than 140 mg sodium per serving.
- **The following foods usually are high in sodium. Try to limit or avoid them:**
 - Canned vegetables or soups
 - Fast food/frozen dinners
 - Bouillon or broth
 - Tomato/vegetable juices
 - Packaged potatoes, rice or stuffing mixes
 - Snack foods, such as chips and salted nuts
 - Bacon/salt pork/ham
 - Hot dogs/sausage
 - Luncheon meats
 - Cheese spreads/canned cheese sauce
 - Condiments, such as ketchup and soy sauce
 - Meat sauces/gravies
 - Barbecue sauce
 - Salad dressings
- **Get enough:**
 - Fresh fruits and vegetables
 - Whole grains
 - Plain whole grain pasta or brown rice (vs. pre-seasoned)
 - Low-fat milk and yogurt
 - Fresh meat and poultry
 - Potassium, such as fruits, vegetables, dairy and fish
 - Calcium, such as low-fat dairy
 - Magnesium, such as whole grains, green leafy vegetables, nuts, seeds and dry peas and beans
- **Read labels and look for labels that indicate foods low in sodium:**
 - Sodium free: less than 5 mg per serving
 - Low sodium: 140 mg or less per serving
 - Very low sodium: 35 mg of or less per serving
- **Choose salt-free seasonings:**
 - Do not add salt when cooking or at the table
 - Use herbs and spices to add flavor to your foods, but avoid those with salt, such as garlic salt or seasoning salt

Step 6: Manage stress.

Stress is a normal part of life, and some stress is actually a good thing. Stress motivates us to get things done. Too much bad stress causes a surge of stress hormones in your body. These hormones temporarily increase your blood pressure by causing your heart to beat faster and your blood vessels to narrow. Getting enough sleep and having a healthy “unwinding” routine at the end of the day are great ways to manage your stress.

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