

All About High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure, or hypertension (the medical term), is called a “silent killer” because many people do not know they have it and do not experience any symptoms. If left untreated, high blood pressure can put serious strain on your heart and put you at increased risk for stroke, heart attack, and heart disease. However, if you are able to manage hypertension well, you can still lead a normal, healthy life.

- Exercise at least 30 minutes each day.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Attend all your healthcare appointments and screenings.
- Take all your medications as directed.



What is a normal blood pressure?

- Age 18-59: less than 140/90
- Age 60 and older: less than 150/90
- Any age with diabetes or chronic kidney disease: less than 140/90

What should I eat?

- Avoid salt. Salt causes your body to retain fluid, which makes your heart work harder, causing your blood pressure to rise. The following foods should be avoided because of their high salt content:
 - Processed meats (cured meats, smoked meats, packaged deli meats, bologna, ham, bacon, sausage, chorizo, spam)
 - Processed cheeses (American, bleu, parmesan, feta, cottage)
 - Fast food (especially French fries)
 - Restaurant food
 - Packaged or “instant” food (instant mashed potatoes, instant ramen, Hamburger Helper)
 - Canned food (soups, vegetables, chilis, meats – look for “no salt added” instead)
 - Frozen dinners
 - Sauces (soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, packaged meat marinades, ketchup, relish, salad dressings)
 - Salty snacks (chips, pretzels, nuts – look for “no salt added” instead)
- Consider the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension). Ask your healthcare provider for more information.
- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean meats (chicken and fish), and whole grains.

Why should I track my blood pressure?

Tracking your blood pressure will help you and your healthcare provider determine if your blood pressure is controlled. Your blood pressure will fluctuate throughout the day, which is normal. For example, your blood pressure might be low when you first wake up in the morning or after a shower, but it might be high if you are rushing or exercising.

Why do I need medicine?

Medicines are prescribed to help you control your blood pressure and prevent serious complications. Different medications work in different ways. For example, a diuretic will help you clear excess water, and a beta blocker will “block” the response of chemicals in our body that lead to stress. Your provider will select the best medication type for you by looking at your other conditions (such as diabetes or kidney disease), your ethnicity, and other personal factors.

What else can I do?

- Limit stress. Stress increases blood pressure and causes other problems with sleep, mood, and memory.
- Limit alcohol. Alcohol increases your blood pressure. You cannot “save” your drinks for the weekend and binge – this raises your blood pressure and puts you at risk for liver disease and impaired judgment.
 - Women and men over age 65 should have no more than 1 drink per day
 - Men under age 65 should have no more than 2 drinks per day.
- Stop smoking. Smoking increases your risk of developing heart disease and is linked to plaque deposits in your arteries. Smoking is also a cause of lung cancer, throat cancer, and bladder cancer, among other harmful effects.