

How Can I Lower High Blood Pressure?

By treating high blood pressure, you can help lower your risk for a stroke, heart attack, heart failure and kidney disease.

These are steps you can take now:

- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that includes vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish, legumes, non-tropical vegetable oils and nuts. Limit sodium, sweets, saturated fats, sugar sweetened beverages and red and processed meats.
- Be more physically active.
- Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Avoid or limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day for women or two drinks a day for men.
- Take your medication as prescribed.
- Know what your blood pressure should be and work to keep it at that level.



How can I lose weight?

To lose weight, you need to use up more calories than you eat and drink each day. Talk with your health care professional about a healthy eating and physical activity plan to help you reach your weight loss goals. When you lose weight, your blood pressure often goes down. An initial weight loss goal of at least 5% can help lower your blood pressure.

How do I limit sodium?

Lower sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day, moving toward an ideal limit of 1,500 mg per day. Even cutting back by 1,000 mg a day can help improve your blood pressure and heart health.

You can lower your sodium intake by:

- Reading the Nutrition Facts label on foods. This tells you how much sodium is in food products. Foods with 140 mg or less sodium per serving are low in sodium.
- Limiting prepackaged and processed foods. Try to buy

fresh foods when you can. When choosing packaged foods, select those labeled "low sodium," "reduced sodium" or "no salt added."

- Using potassium-based salt substitutes can be another way to lower sodium intake and help prevent or treat elevated or high blood pressure. This is true especially if most of your salt comes from home-cooked or home-seasoned food. Check with your health care professional before using, if you have kidney disease or take medications that affect potassium.
- Lowering salt in cooking and at the table. Learn to use herbs and salt-free spices instead.

How do I avoid or limit alcohol?

Ask your health care professional if it's OK for you to drink alcohol. If so, ask how much.

Drinking more than two drinks a day if you're a man or more than one drink a day if you're a woman may add to high blood pressure. One drink is equal to 12 ounces of

(continued)



How Can I Lower High Blood Pressure?

beer, 5 ounces of wine, 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits or 1 ounce of 100-proof spirits.

If cutting back on alcohol is hard to do on your own, ask about groups that can help.

How can I be more active?

Regular physical activity can help to lower blood pressure, maintain a healthy weight and lower stress. It's best to start slowly and do something you enjoy, such as taking brisk walks or riding a bicycle. You can look for safe, low-cost places to exercise, such as the YMCA, community or senior centers, parks and recreation departments and faith-based groups.

Aim to include both aerobic and resistance exercise each week to help lower and control blood pressure. Types of activities include walking, jogging and weight lifting. Talk to your health care professional about a good plan for you.

What should I know about medication?

Depending on your risk and blood pressure levels, you may need one or more types of medication to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level. You may need a trial period before your health care professional finds the best medication, or combination of medications, for you.



What's most important is that you take your medication exactly as prescribed. Never stop treatment on your own. If you have problems or side effects from your medication, talk to your health care professional.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

Can I drink any alcohol?

How often should I check my blood pressure?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to lower your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.