

Tips for Managing Blood Pressure

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of flowing blood pushing against blood vessel walls. Blood pressure is measured with two numbers (i.e. 120/80 mmHg).

- The first number is referred to as **systolic pressure**, which represents the pressure when your heart contracts and pumps the blood through your body.
- The second number is referred to as **diastolic pressure**, and it represents the pressure when your heart is at rest between beats.

High blood pressure, also known as **hypertension**, means that the pressure in your arteries is consistently above the normal range. If your blood pressure is consistently at or above 140/90, then you are considered to have high blood pressure. People with diabetes are at greater risk of complications from high blood pressure, and should maintain a blood pressure of 130/80 or below.

What causes high blood pressure?

In most cases the cause of high blood pressure is unknown. When the cause is unknown, it is called *essential hypertension*. If a disease or other physical problem is causing high blood pressure, then it is called *secondary hypertension*. Common causes are kidney or thyroid disease. There are also many other factors associated with high blood pressure, including family history, age, race, stress, obesity, smoking, a high-salt diet, high alcohol consumption, and an inactive lifestyle.

What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

There usually are no noticeable symptoms of high blood pressure, which is why regular blood pressure checks by a health care provider are essential. High blood pressure that goes undetected can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney failure, blindness, and other conditions.

Who is at greatest risk for high blood pressure?

- People who have a **close relative** (parent, brother/sister) with high blood pressure
- African-Americans
- People who **smoke**
- People who are **overweight**
- People who **eat too much salt**
- People who drink **more than two alcoholic beverages per day**
- People who are constantly under a lot of **stress**
- People with an **inactive lifestyle**

How can I lower my blood pressure/reduce my risk of developing high blood pressure?

Consider making some lifestyle changes to help lower or reduce your risk of developing high blood pressure. Be sure to know what your blood pressure should be and work to keep it at that level.

- Quit smoking.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Get enough exercise regularly.
- Find healthy ways to manage stress.
- Limit alcoholic beverages.

How can I lower my blood pressure/reduce my risk of developing high blood pressure? *continued*

Diets high in salt (sodium) and fat can lead to high blood pressure. The recommended daily amount of sodium (salt) is 2400 mg or less, and fat should only make up no more than 30% of your total calories. Check out the rest of our tips at www.HillPhysicians.com for more advice on managing weight and maintaining good nutrition. **To reduce salt and fat:**

- Take the saltshaker off the table or simply do not add salt to your food.
- Bake, broil, steam, or grill foods (lower in fat than frying or sautéing).
- Use low-salt, low-fat dressings and condiments on salads and sandwiches.
- Purchase and begin using a cookbook of low-salt, low-fat recipes, or look for ways to reduce fat and salt in the recipes you already use.
- Be mindful of packaged foods. Read nutrition labels for the total amount of sodium and fat. Check to see the amount of sodium per serving and keep in mind the RDA of 2400 mg.

Stress is also a major factor. The best plan for reducing stress is to identify the causes of your stress and change how you think or react to it. Prioritize and remember the important people/activities in your life and make time for yourself. **Follow these tips for reducing stress:**

- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a healthy diet and avoid or decrease beverages with caffeine (coffee, colas).
- Get enough sleep.
- Practice yoga or other relaxation techniques.
- Join a support group for others who are dealing with events/problems like yours.

Your healthcare provider can work with you to help control your blood pressure:

- **Have your blood pressure checked regularly.** Your healthcare provider may recommend checking your blood pressure daily at home using a home monitoring kit.
- **Keep a record of your blood pressure on a card** in your wallet or handbag.
- **Take your healthcare provider's advice and be sure to voice your concerns.** Before appointments, take a few minutes to write down any questions or concerns. Bring a pen and paper with you to your appointment, in order to write down any recommendations or comments. Review these later to remember the conversation and decide future actions.
- **Medications:** If lifestyle changes do not help lower your blood pressure, your healthcare provider might prescribe medication. He/she will prescribe the type of medication that is best for your needs, and inform you of any possible side effects. It is important to keep track of your medications, develop a routine for taking them, take them exactly as prescribed, and continue taking them unless instructed by your healthcare provider to stop.

Resources

Learn more online at www.HillPhysicians.com. Stay up-to-date on this and other health topics by registering for **Hill HealthE-news** at www.HillPhysicians.com/Subscribe.

You may also find useful information through:

The American Heart Association: **1-800-242-872** or www.americanheart.org

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: **1-800-575-9355** or www.nhlbi.nih.gov

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