



How Can I Reduce High Blood Pressure?

By treating high blood pressure, you can help reduce your risk for a stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure. Here are steps you can take now:

- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that is rich in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains and includes low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish, legumes (beans and peas), nontropical vegetable oils and nuts; and limits intake of sodium, sweets, sugar sweetened beverages and red meats.
- Be more physically active.
- Don't smoke and avoid second-hand smoke.
- Limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day for women or two drinks a day for men.
- Take medicine the way your doctor tells you.
- Know what your blood pressure should be and work to keep it at that level.



Many people have high blood pressure without knowing it. Once you know about your condition, though, you can reduce your risk and live a healthier life. It takes proper treatment and some changes in your lifestyle. But it's worth it!

How can I lose weight?

If you're overweight, you're putting too much strain on your heart. Talk with your healthcare provider about a healthy eating plan. When you lose weight, your blood pressure often goes down! By eating a diet low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, salt (sodium) and added sugars, you'll help reduce your risk for heart attack and stroke.

How do I limit salt?

Eating a lot of salt (sodium) increases blood pressure in many people. It holds excess fluid in your body and puts an added burden on your heart. Your doctor may tell you to cut down on the salt you use in cooking and not add salt to foods. He or she may also tell you to avoid salt completely.

Read food labels so you'll know which foods are high in sodium. And learn to use herbs and salt-free spices instead!

How do I limit alcohol?

Ask your doctor if you're allowed to drink alcohol, and if so, how much. If you drink more than two drinks a day if you're male or more than one drink a day if you're female, it may add to high blood pressure. One drink is equal to 12 ounces of 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 for you to do on your own, ask about community groups that can help.

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How can I be more active?

An inactive lifestyle is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke. It also tends to add to obesity, which is a risk factor for high blood pressure. Regular physical activity helps to reduce blood pressure, control weight and reduce stress. It's best to start slowly and do something you enjoy, like taking brisk walks or riding a bicycle. If you have high blood pressure, you should aim for at least 40 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity 3 to 4 times per week. Talk to your healthcare provider about a good plan for you.

What should I know about medicine?

Your doctors may prescribe different types of medicine for you. Don't be discouraged if you need to take blood pressure medicine from now on. Sometimes you can take smaller doses after your blood pressure is under control, but you may always need some treatment.

What's most important is that you take your medicine exactly the way your doctor tells you to. Never stop treatment on your own. If you have problems or side effects with your medicine, talk to your doctor.



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 to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine 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 the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

Can I drink any alcohol?

How often should my blood pressure be checked?

My Questions:

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