

Understanding High Blood Pressure

A normal blood pressure is 120/80. The top number is the systolic pressure and the bottom number is diastolic pressure. Hypertension (or high blood pressure) exists when either the top number is 140 or higher, OR the bottom number is 90 or higher on repeated measurements. If your blood pressure numbers are higher than 120/80, but below 140/90, it is called prehypertension.

The cause of hypertension is unknown in most cases, but can be controlled with lifestyle changes and/or medicines. High blood pressure may cause headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, rushing sounds in your ears, chest pain or shortness of breath. It may also cause no symptoms at all. Untreated hypertension increases the risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease. It is a serious health risk and should not be ignored.

According to the World Health Organization, hypertension is responsible for 51% of all deaths globally from stroke.

Steps to Lowering Blood Pressure:

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** A BMI higher than 25 is considered overweight. A 10% body weight loss can make a significant improvement to your health.
 - **Get enough exercise.** Discuss with your doctor exercise programs. Even brisk walking for 20 minutes three times a week is a good form of exercise. Take the stairs rather than using an elevator. Park farther from your destinations and walk.
 - **End tobacco and nicotine use.** Consult with your doctor if you need assistance in tobacco cessation. This includes not using electronic cigarettes.
 - **Moderate or eliminate alcohol consumption.** Moderate consumption for women is classified as one drink for women and two for men per day.
 - **Reduce salt intake.** Avoid high salt foods such as olives, pickles, smoked meats, salted nuts, salted potato chips, etc. Monitor sodium content in processed foods. The amount of sodium you consume per day should not exceed 1,500 mg.
 - **Avoid medicines containing heart stimulants.** Read labels for warnings about hypertension on cold and sinus medicines, nose sprays, and diet pills.
 - **Limit caffeine intake or switch to caffeine-free items.**
 - **Learn how to better handle stress.** Relaxation methods such as meditation, yoga, and biofeedback can help to lower blood pressure.
 - **Consider buying an automatic blood pressure machine for home use.** Monitor and record your blood pressure and report this to your doctor.
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GET PROMPT MEDICAL ATTENTION if any of the following occur:

- Chest pain or shortness of breath
- Severe headache
- Throbbing or rushing sound in the ears
- Nosebleed
- Sudden severe abdominal pain
- Extreme drowsiness, confusion or fainting
- Dizziness or vertigo (dizziness with spinning sensation)
- Weakness of an arm or leg or one side of the face
- Difficulty with speech or vision

*Adapted from a handout by **foodandhealth.com***

*For more information visit:
American Heart Association **www.heart.org***
