



## High Blood Pressure

### What is it?

Blood pressure is the force of your blood moving against the walls of your arteries. It's expressed as two numbers:

1. Your systolic blood pressure (top number) – the pressure or force in the arteries when the heart beats

**OVER**

2. Your diastolic blood pressure (bottom number) –the lowest pressure measured when the heart is at rest between beats

If you have high blood pressure, your reading is “140 over 90” (140/90 mmHg) or higher. High blood pressure (also called hypertension) forces the heart to work harder. Over time, this can weaken the heart muscle, upping your chances of a stroke, heart attack, kidney damage and vision loss. But there are plenty of steps you can take to lower this number.

Your doctor has probably set a target goal for your blood pressure. For people with coronary artery disease, diabetes and chronic kidney disease you may want to keep you blood pressure under 130 over 80.

### Know Your Numbers:

Types of BP	Systolic BP (mm Hg)		Diastolic BP (mm Hg)
Normal blood pressure	below 120	and	below 80
Upper end of normal (also called prehypertension)	120 to 139	or	80-89
High blood pressure (also called hypertension)	140 and above	or	90 and above

### 10 Tips for Managing Your High Blood Pressure

Simple lifestyle changes can go a long way to lower blood pressure. When they don't, blood pressure-lowering medications usually can.

1. **Get moving.** Regular physical activity is known to lower blood pressure. It also supports good heart health as we age and helps combat stress.



Too busy to exercise? Simply taking more steps every day can pay off. Consider buying a pedometer – a device that clips onto your belt that counts the number of steps you take – and try to walk more than 10,000 steps a day (that’s about four miles!). It sounds like a lot, but it’s easier than you might think. Build exercise into your daily routine. For example, park farther away from the store, take the stairs instead of the elevator, go for a brisk 10-minute walk during your lunch hour.

“When it comes to lowering your blood pressure, improving your dietary and exercise habits is essential. Sometimes people go right to medications, but losing 10 pounds if the person needs to and getting into a regular exercise routine can have a big impact.”

– Roger S. Blumenthal, MD,  
Johns Hopkins Hospital  
Ciccarone Preventive  
Cardiology Center

2. Focus on nutrition. What you choose to put into your body can affect the way it works, fights disease and stays healthy. It can also influence blood pressure levels. Try to eat a diet low in saturated fats and packed with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products.

3. Put down the salt shaker. Consuming lots of salt can boost your blood pressure readings, so try to cut it out of your diet. Limit your sodium intake to no more than 2,400 mg a day (about the amount in a teaspoon); your doctor may advise even less depending on your blood pressure level.

Most dietary salt comes from packaged and processed foods and eating out. When you cook, use spices and herbs for flavor instead of reaching for the salt shaker.

4. Watch your portions. You probably remember the familiar saying “your eyes are bigger than your stomach.” Not watching portion sizes is one way we can get into trouble – by eating too many calories and gradually packing on the pounds. Don’t fill your plate or eat more than you need to. If you eat meat, make sure it is no bigger than the size of a pack of cards.

5. Shed excess pounds. Losing just 10 pounds (if you need to) can make a big difference in your blood pressure readings. Trimming down has a host of other health benefits too. If you are very overweight or obese, try to lose two pounds a month over the next six months.

6. If you are prescribed medicine for high blood pressure, take it every day. Your medication won’t work unless you take it as directed. Always let your doctor know of any side effects you experience or if you can’t afford your medication. Never stop, skip or change the amount (dose) of medication without talking to your doctor first.

7. Check your blood pressure as often as your doctor recommends. If you don’t have a home blood pressure cuff, free blood pressure machines have started popping up in many local drug stores and even some grocery stores. Keep an eye out for one, roll up your sleeve and check your blood pressure numbers. Your blood pressure fluctuates, so you should check it on several different occasions.



8. Cut back on alcohol or don't drink at all. Men should not consume more than two drinks a day; women should only have one. If you smoke, stop.

9. Breathe easy. High and prolonged levels of stress can up your blood pressure. It can also lead to depression and anxiety. Anything that can help you to relax – for example, meditation, yoga, stress management, pacing and setting limits – may help lower blood pressure.

10. Get enough sleep. Sleep deprivation can leave you zapped of energy. It can also affect your health. Your body is thought to regulate hormones – including stress hormones – and repair injuries to the body as you sleep. Not catching enough ZZZs means this may not happen. If you are having difficulty sleeping through the night, talk with your doctor about how to get more rest.

#### Did You Know?

One in three Americans has high blood pressure, and many don't even know they have it.

### Questions to Ask Your Health Team

Think about and write down questions or concerns you have before each appointment so that you don't forget. Here are some examples:

- What are my current blood pressure numbers?
- What is my target blood pressure?
- Should I be taking my blood pressure at home? How often?
- What might be causing my high blood pressure?
- How much should I weigh/what is my ideal body weight?
- What types of food can help me keep my blood pressure in check? What is the DASH diet?
- How much exercise should I be getting?
- What are the possible side effects of my blood pressure medication?
- If I have diabetes or metabolic syndrome, are there blood pressure medications that are better for me?
- Can stress and anxiety raise blood pressure levels?

For more information, visit CardioSmart at [www.CardioSmart.org](http://www.CardioSmart.org).