## You're in Control

Work with your health care provider and take care of yourself — two important ways to lower your blood pressure. Remember these tips:

1. Take your medication as prescribed, even if you feel fine. Examples: Diuretics (to rid the body of fluid and sodium), beta-blockers (to reduce heart rate) and calcium channel blockers, ACE inhibitors and angiotensin antagonists (to open blood vessels).
2. See your health care provider for regular blood pressure screenings.
3. Check your blood pressure at home, especially if you have "white coat syndrome," which means that your blood pressure goes up temporarily in the doctor's office. Your provider can show a friend or family member how to use the blood pressure cuff (called a sphygmomanometer).
4. Quit smoking. Talk to your health care provider about quitting strategies.

Finding out you have high blood pressure does not have to mean you're on the road to health problems. Think of it as a wake-up call and concentrate on what you can do to get those numbers lower.

## Focus on Fitness

Exercise helps you keep a healthy weight and lowers blood pressure. ***Note:*** Try to get moving for at least 30 minutes every day.

- Run errands on foot or by bicycle instead of driving.
- Ride a stationary bicycle while you watch your favorite TV shows.
- Fly a kite in the park.
- Rent a paddleboat at the local pond.
- Plant a garden.
- Walk around a local mall.

The possibilities are endless, and they all help lower your blood pressure.

## Blood Pressure Screening: What to Expect

A blood pressure test only takes a few minutes and is painless. A health professional will wrap a wide cuff around your upper arm. The cuff will tighten as it is inflated, squeezing an artery in your arm and stopping blood flow temporarily.

The health professional listens to the blood pulse through your arteries with a stethoscope as the air is released and blood flow returns.

Note: It's important that you sit quietly for 5 minutes in order for the test to be accurate. Also, your blood pressure may be higher in one arm than the other, so you may need to have it measured in both.

Blood pressure measurements are recorded as millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). For example, your blood pressure might be 130/79 mm Hg ("139 over 79"). The first number is systolic pressure (the pressure in the artery when the heart beats), and the second is diastolic pressure (the pressure in the artery between heartbeats).

Blood pressure guidelines emphasize paying attention to blood pressure before it's too high. There's even a category to describe those at greater risk: prehypertension.

Previously, blood pressures under 140/90 mm Hg were categorized as "normal," "high normal" or "borderline," with 120/80 being ideal. Now experts say that people with blood pressures between 120-139 systolic and 80-89 diastolic have **prehypertension** and should be treated more aggressively. The reason? People in this range are much more likely to develop high blood pressure than those with lower numbers.

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# HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

## Your Guide to Managing Hypertension

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# HYPERTENSION: KNOW THE FACTS

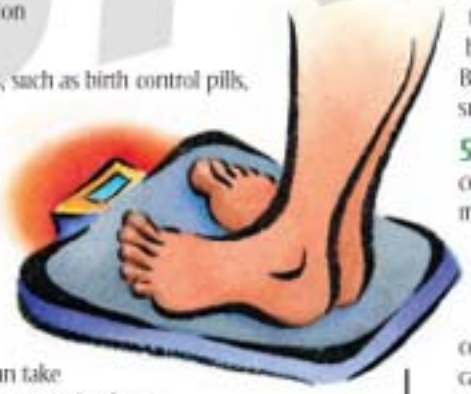
Regular blood pressure checks are an easy way to take care of yourself. Experts recommend having yours checked at least every one to two years by a health professional. High blood pressure (hypertension) can lead to health problems, such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). It can be treated through medication and lifestyle changes.

You may be thinking: I don't have hypertension, I feel fine. But one in four Americans has hypertension, and a third of the people who have it don't know it. Hypertension has no symptoms. It contributes to more than 200,000 deaths per year, most of them from heart disease and stroke. That's why it's sometimes called a "silent killer."

## Who's at Risk?

The following factors put you at risk for developing hypertension:

- Family history
- Race (African-Americans are more likely to develop hypertension.)
- Sex (Men are more likely than women to have hypertension, although after menopause women are at equal or greater risk.)
- Age (Risk goes up as you get older.)
- Being overweight
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- Smoking
- Use of some medications, such as birth control pills, aspirin and ibuprofen
- Lack of exercise
- Sodium (salt) sensitivity



Remember:
Hypertension is treatable. Even if your blood pressure is normal now, there are steps you can take to keep from developing hypertension later.

## Eating by the Numbers

Keeping your weight at a healthy level helps keep your blood pressure on track as well.

**1. Eat less fat.** Fat is high in calories and can contribute to obesity and hypertension. Actions: Cut down on butter, margarine, fatty salad dressings, whole-milk dairy products, fried foods, red meat and sweets. Instead choose lean meats (such as skinless poultry) and fish, and low-fat dairy products. Other good choices include rice and pasta (without cream or cheese sauces), breads, cold cereals with skim milk, and cooked (not instant) hot cereals.

**2. Choose fiber.** Fiber-rich foods are high in vitamins and minerals and low in fat. Great sources: Fruits and vegetables; whole-grain breads, pastas and rice; dried peas, beans and lentils are also high in fiber.

**3. Drink alcohol only in moderation.** Alcohol can raise blood pressure. Limit yourself to no more than two drinks per day for men, one drink per day for women.

**4. Get more potassium.** Eating foods rich in potassium can help protect against hypertension. There are many potassium-rich foods; the best sources include freshwater fish (catfish, cod, flounder, trout), lean pork, dried peas and beans, apricots, bananas, prunes, plantains and sweet and white potatoes. Note: Because people generally can get enough potassium from foods, a supplement is often considered unnecessary.

**5. Mind your magnesium.** A low-magnesium diet can contribute to high blood pressure. You can get plenty of magnesium by eating whole grains, leafy green vegetables, nuts, seeds and dried peas, beans and lentils. Doctors recommend against taking magnesium supplements.

**6. Increase fish oils.** Omega-3 fatty acids are found in cold-water fish such as mackerel and salmon. Eating more of them can help reduce high blood pressure. Just make sure your fish is broiled or baked instead of fried.

## The Truth About Salt

Eating salty foods does not cause hypertension. But some people who suffer from hypertension are sensitive to sodium (African-Americans and the elderly are more likely to be salt-sensitive than other people.). There is no way to tell whether or not you are sodium-sensitive, so the safest bet is to cut down on your salt intake.

***Here's how:***

- Consume no more than 2,300 mg of sodium per day. That's only about 1 teaspoon of salt.
- Choose foods that say "sodium free," "low sodium" or "unsalted."
- Buy fresh or frozen vegetables with no salt added.
- Use fresh poultry, fish and lean meat, instead of canned or processed.
- Flavor foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.
- Avoid instant foods, frozen dinners and canned soups.

## Noise and Your Blood Pressure

Research has shown that workers exposed to long-term high noise levels on the job may have a rise in blood pressure. The effect was greater for workers performing simple, repetitive jobs than for those with a high level of job complexity. If you work in a high-noise environment, wear proper hearing protection. This will help prevent permanent hearing damage and may protect your heart as well.

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