Focus on Fitness

Exercise lowers blood pressure and helps you maintain a healthy weight. Get moving for 30 minutes 4-5 times a week.

- **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.

What Do the Numbers Mean?

Blood pressure measurements are recorded as millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). For example, your blood pressure might be 130/79 mm Hg ("130 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.

Tips for Staying in Control

1. Take your medication as prescribed, even if you feel fine.
2. See your doctor 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 doctor can show a friend or family member how to use the blood pressure cuff (called a sphygmomanometer).
4. Quit smoking. Talk to your doctor about quitting strategies.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Your Guide to Managing Hypertension

STALKING A SILENT KILLER

Regular blood pressure checks are an easy way to take care of yourself. Experts recommend having your blood pressure checked at least every one to two years by a health professional. High blood pressure (hypertension) can cause health problems, including heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). There is no cure for hypertension, but it can be treated through medication and lifestyle changes.

Risk Factors

- 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

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 sodium-sensitive.). 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.

Eating by the Numbers

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

1. Eat less fat. Cut down on butter, margarine, fatty salad dressings, whole-milk dairy products, fried foods, red meat and sweets. Choose lean meats (such as skinless poultry) and fish, low-fat dairy products, cold cereals with skim milk, and cooked (not instant) hot cereals.

2. Choose fiber. Great sources include fruits and vegetables; whole-grain breads, pastas and rice; and dried peas, beans and lentils.

3. Drink alcohol only in moderation. Limit yourself to no more than two drinks a day for men, one drink per day for women.

4. Get more potassium. 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. Eat 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. Make sure your fish is broiled or baked instead of fried.

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional care. Medical Editor: Zeeba Parkes, M.D.
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