

# Living Well to Keep Your Pressure Down<sup>1</sup>

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## Am I at Risk for High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure, or hypertension, can cause serious health problems. It makes your heart work harder and can damage your blood vessels even if you feel okay. Everyone should have their blood pressure checked regularly. If you have certain risk factors you are more likely to have high blood pressure. Check all of the risk factors for high blood pressure that apply to you:

- There is high blood pressure in my family.
- I'm a man over age 40.
- I'm a woman past menopause.
- I'm African American.
- I'm obese.
- I'm physically inactive.



## Can I Decrease My Risk?

Yes, you **can** decrease your risk of getting high blood pressure! Look at these five guidelines. They can help you control your blood pressure and reduce your health risks.

- ↪ Aim for a healthy weight.
- ↪ Be physically active each day.
- ↪ Choose and prepare foods with little salt.
- ↪ Aim to eat at least 2 cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables every day.



↪ If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

Following these guidelines will help keep you healthy. Your family will also benefit if they follow these guidelines. Let's see how you can apply them to your life.

## Aim for a Healthy Weight

## Why Worry about Body Weight?

As body weight increases, blood pressure tends to rise. If you are overweight, you can reduce your risk of high blood pressure by losing weight. Even losing a few pounds can help prevent high blood pressure. If you are overweight and already have high blood pressure, losing weight can help lower it.

## What Is a Healthy Weight for Me?

There are charts that you can use to see if your weight is in a healthy range. Find out your body mass index (BMI) at <http://www.bmi-calculator.net>. You can also think of a healthy weight as one at which you feel good and you are at low risk for disease. A healthy weight for you is one that you can maintain with a healthy lifestyle.



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Ask yourself the following questions to see if you are at a healthy weight for you:

- ▶ Is my blood pressure normal?
- ▶ Is my blood cholesterol normal?
- ▶ Is my blood glucose (sugar) normal?
- ▶ Can I do moderate exercise comfortably?
- ▶ Can I maintain my weight without severe dieting?
- ▶ Do I eat a variety of healthful foods in moderation?
- ▶ Do I feel healthy?

If you answered “yes” to each question, then you probably are at a healthy weight for you. If you answered “no” to one or more questions, then your weight may be putting you at risk for high blood pressure and other conditions. You may want to discuss your overall health with your doctor and see if she/he has any suggestions.



You can get more information about healthy eating for weight management from your county Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent. Check to see what healthy lifestyles programs are available in your county.

A great way to start living a healthy lifestyle is to be more active. This section provides tips on how to include physical activity in your life. Being physically active will reduce your risk for high blood pressure and help keep you healthy.

**Be physically active each day**

Here are a few of the benefits of being an active person. Check those that are important to you.

- € Help attain/maintain a healthy body weight
- € Help attain/maintain normal blood pressure
- € Help attain/maintain normal blood cholesterol

- € Decrease risk of heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and some types of cancer
- € Increase energy level
- € Enhance sense of well being

**How Much Exercise Should I Do?**

Aim for **at least** 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. Most people will gain greater health benefits with longer or more vigorous activity. Keep in mind that you do **not** have to do all of your exercise at one time! You will still get health benefits if you are active two or three times a day for a total of 30 or more minutes. Here is one example of how to do this:

- ✓ Walk the dog briskly, 15 minutes
- ✓ Walk during coffee break, 15 minutes
- ✓ Stretches and light weights while watching or listening to the news, 15-40 minutes

Light activities, if done daily, can help keep you fit and lower your risk for high blood pressure. To increase your activity, start doing some of these:

- ✓ Use stairs instead of elevators.
- ✓ Get off the bus one or two stops early and walk the rest of the way.
- ✓ Park at the back of the parking lot.
- ✓ Ride a bike to the store, to work, or for fun.
- ✓ Work in the yard or garden.
- ✓ Move to your favorite lively music as you clean the house.
- ✓ Play actively with your children.



Vigorous exercise helps improve the fitness of the heart and lungs. That protects you more against heart disease. Activities like swimming, brisk walking, running, bicycling, dancing, and jumping rope are “aerobic.” Aerobic activities require



oxygen. They condition your heart and lungs if done at the right intensity for at least 30 minutes,

three to four times a week.

If you don't have 30 minutes, find two 15-minute periods or even three 10-minute periods. Keep track of your activity with an activity log.

My Activity Log		
Mon. 1/24	Walked dog Played catch	15 min. 10 min.
Wed. 1/26	Gardened Walked dog	20 min. 15 min.
Thurs. 1/27	Walked up stairs Vacuumed to music	3 flights 10 min.

### Do I Need to See My Doctor First?

Most people **don't** need to see a doctor before they start exercising. A gradual, sensible exercise program has few health risks. **Do** check with your doctor first if you are going to start a **vigorous activity plan** and have any of the following:



- ✓ Chronic health problem such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, or obesity.
- ✓ High risk for heart disease:
  - a) Personal or family history
  - b) Smoke cigarettes
  - c) Have a sedentary lifestyle
  - d) Have abnormal blood lipids
- ✓ You feel dizzy or faint when you are physically active.
- ✓ You get breathless after a mild workout.
- ✓ You are a man over 40 years of age or a woman over 50.

### Choose and prepare foods with little salt

Americans eat more salt (sodium chloride) than they need. They also have higher rates of high blood pressure than people in other countries. Much of the salt we get in our diets is from packaged foods and restaurants. Doing more home cooking using low-salt ingredients can help you control the amount of salt in your diet.



Often, when people with high blood pressure cut back on salt, their blood pressure falls. Eating less salt also can prevent blood pressure from rising in the first place. African Americans and older adults often are more affected by salt in the diet than others. There's no way to tell who will get high blood pressure when they eat too much salt. So, it's recommended that everyone keep their intake of salt moderate.

### How Much Salt or Sodium Is Recommended?

Consume less than one teaspoon of salt a day. This is about 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium, much less than most Americans consume.

Many persons would benefit from eating even less sodium. Those with high blood pressure, African Americans, and middle-aged and older adults should aim for no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day.

### Aim to eat at least 2 cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables every day


Eating lots of fruits and vegetables each day can help keep your blood pressure low. It also can help lower high blood pressure if it already is high.



Select a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables in season and locally grown when possible. This will give you the most nutrients and also will keep costs lower. Canned (without salt or added sugars) and frozen choices also are good options.

### Ways to Decrease Your Salt Intake

#### At the Store

- ↪ Choose fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables without added salt or sauces.
- ↪ Choose fresh or frozen fish, shellfish, poultry, and meat. 
- ↪ Read the Nutrition Facts label to compare the amount of sodium in processed foods like frozen dinners, soups, cereals, and sauces. Salt content varies widely. Be sure to check the serving size when comparing foods!
- ↪ Look for labels that say “low-sodium.” They contain 140 milligrams of sodium or less per serving.
- ↪ Ask your grocer or supermarket manager to offer more low-sodium foods.

#### Cooking and Eating at Home

- ↪ Use little or no salt in cooking or at the table. Instead, use spices and herbs to enhance the flavor of food. Salt in many recipes can be

reduced without loss of quality, although certain recipes may require some salt. When using salt, be sure to use the iodized form.

- ↪ Go easy on condiments such as soy sauce, ketchup, pickles, and olives.
- ↪ Leave the salt shaker in a cupboard!

#### Eating Out

- ↪ Choose plain foods like grilled or roasted entrees. Combination dishes like stews or pasta tend to be high in salt.
- ↪ Ask to have no salt added when the food is prepared.

#### Snacking

- ↪ Choose fruits and vegetables (without added salt) instead of salty snacks most of the time.



- ↪ Drink water. It is usually very low in sodium. Check the label on bottled water for sodium content.

### How Many Fruits and Vegetables Do I Need to Eat?




Eat AT LEAST 2 cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables each day. More is better for decreasing risk of high blood pressure.





Suggested intake from each food group depends on calorie needs. To find the calorie level that is right for you, and amount of food to eat from each food group, visit: <http://www.MyPyramid.gov>.

## How Can Fruits and Vegetables Help Keep My Blood Pressure Low?

Fruits and vegetables:

-  Are naturally low in sodium.
-  Contain minerals like potassium and magnesium that help lower blood pressure.
-  Are naturally low in fat and high in fiber which can help with weight management.

Here are some tips for adding fruits and vegetables to your daily diet:

- ☺ Add fresh berries or sliced banana to your cereal in the morning.
- ☺ Snack on dried fruit like apricots, raisins, dried plums/prunes (try the flavored kind for a special treat).
- ☺ Keep washed and cut up carrot and celery sticks in the refrigerator at work and at home for a quick and healthy snack. 
- ☺ Order a salad instead of French fries if you have fast food.
- ☺ Have boxes of 100% fruit juice handy for a quick and healthy drink break. 
- ☺ Keep fresh fruit available in the refrigerator (except bananas) for a quick and healthy snack.
- ☺ Add extra fresh or frozen vegetables when you make “from scratch” or pre-packaged soups, stews, and other mixed dishes.

## If you Drink Alcoholic Beverages, Do So Sensibly and in Moderation



Drinking too much alcohol can lead to high blood pressure. Men who drink alcohol should have no more than two drinks a day and women no more than one drink per day, if they drink at all.

### What counts as a drink?

- 1½ ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits
- 5 ounces of wine
- 12 ounces of beer (regular or light)

## But Isn't Drinking Wine Good for My Heart?

Moderate drinking of red wine may lower the risk of heart disease for some people. But there are other practices that also can reduce risk of heart disease. These include eating a healthy diet, being physically active, not smoking, and maintaining a healthy weight.



## What Else Can Reduce Risk of High Blood Pressure?

Other practices help prevent high blood pressure. Let's look at a few of them.

### Get Your Minerals from Foods!

The minerals potassium, magnesium, and calcium may play a role in keeping blood pressure down. Include food sources of these minerals every day.

For *potassium*, enjoy:

- a variety of fruits and vegetables
- fish, lean pork, and veal

- dry peas and beans (legumes)
- low-fat milk

For *magnesium*, enjoy:

- whole grain foods
- nuts and seeds
- dry peas and beans



For *calcium*, enjoy:

- low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese
- green leafy vegetables
- calcium-fortified foods, including orange juice, breads, and cereals



Populations with low calcium intakes have high rates of high blood pressure. Get the recommended amount of calcium every day from the foods you eat. If your calcium needs are high, a calcium supplement can help to meet your goal, but it may not affect your risk for high blood pressure.

**Recommended Calcium Intake**

Age (years)	Calcium (mg)
9-18	1,300
19-50	1,000
51+	1,200

Post-menopausal women not on hormone replacement therapy may have higher calcium needs; check with your doctor.

**Practice Stress Management**

Stress can cause your blood pressure to rise. Over time, stress may help to cause high blood pressure that can lead to a heart attack or stroke. Stress management techniques include relaxation and meditation. They may not help prevent high blood

pressure, but they feel good and may help you stick to an exercise or weight management program which **can** help you manage your blood pressure.



Follow all of these guidelines to help reduce your risk for high blood pressure. The healthy lifestyle practices we discussed here also will lower your risk for heart disease and stroke.

**Want to Know More?**

For more information on high blood pressure, weight management, or physical activity, or to get healthy recipes and eating tips for healthy living, contact:

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Information Center, (301) 592-8573, <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>
- Healthfinder, from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.healthfinder.gov>
- National Stroke Association, (800) STROKES, <http://www.stroke.org>
- Fruits and Veggies More Matters: <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org>

Call your county Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent to see what healthy lifestyles educational programs are offered in your county. Your County Extension office should be listed in the Blue Pages of your telephone book, under county government. You also can find the location and contact information for the Extension office in your county on-line at: <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map/>.