

## Tips to Lower Your Blood Pressure

Controlled blood pressure lowers your risk of heart attack and stroke. Medication is only one option for lowering high blood pressure. Try these tips and you may see results in as soon as a few weeks.

**1 Know your numbers.** The best way to know your blood pressure numbers is to have your doctor check. If your pressure is 140/90 or higher, you have high blood pressure. In certain conditions, your doctor might suggest that you aim for lower blood pressure levels.

**2 Monitor your pressure at home,** if your doctor suggests it. Ask your doctor to recommend an appropriate device. Once you have it, ask your doctor to show you how to use it correctly. Take readings at the same time(s) each day, but don't take them right after waking up or within 30 minutes after eating, exercising, smoking or drinking alcohol or caffeine. Write your readings down and share them with your doctor at each visit. Bring your device with you, too, so your doctor can make sure it's working properly.

**3 Make changes to your diet.** Aim for 1,500 mg of sodium a day. Check food labels for sodium content. Try to choose foods that have 200 mg or less of sodium per serving. Limit high sodium items like soy sauce, salad dressing, lunch meats and prepared foods. Include Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) in your diet—DASH suggests that each day you eat: at least 4 servings each of fruit and vegetables; 2-3 servings of low-fat dairy products; and no more than 171 grams of lean meat.

**4 Lose weight.** Losing as little as 10 pounds can lower your blood pressure. Talk to your doctor about an eating plan, such as the DASH diet, tailored to your needs.

**5 Exercise regularly.** Physical activity has many benefits. Aim for at least 30 minutes of planned physical activity 5 days a week. Find ways to increase your physical activity—use the stairs instead of the elevator, take a walk instead of watching TV.



**6 Stop smoking.** The nicotine in tobacco products can raise your blood pressure by as much as 10 points for up to an hour after you smoke. Ask your doctor for help quitting. Avoid being around others who smoke.

**7 Watch the caffeine.** Not everyone's blood pressure is sensitive to caffeine. If your pressure increases by 5 to 10 points within 30 minutes of drinking caffeine, you may need to cut back. There is a lot of caffeine in coffee, tea and some sodas.

**8 Reduce stress.** Identify sources of stress in your life and consider what changes you can make to reduce stress. Try a stress-reducing activity, such as tai chi, yoga, meditation or deep-breathing exercises.

**9 Limit alcohol.** Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure and reduce the effectiveness of blood pressure medications. Limit alcohol to two drinks a day for men and one a day for women. A drink is 355 ml of beer, 148 ml of wine or 44 ml of liquor.

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