

Ease your pressure, energize your heart

MANAGE YOUR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

There are many ways to take good care of your heart. One of the best is to keep your blood pressure under control. You need blood pressure to move blood through your body. But when it is too high, your heart is working harder than normal. That can lead to conditions like stroke, kidney failure and heart attack.

The good news is that by controlling the lifestyle choices you make each day, you *can* control your condition. So keep the pressure off! These tips can help.

Check your pressure

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it checked. Thankfully, it's easy and pain-free — no needles! Your blood pressure is measured by one number over a second number. Here is what the numbers mean:

- **Top number:** This higher number is your systolic reading. It is the pressure in the blood vessels as your heart beats.
- **Bottom number:** This lower number is your diastolic reading. It is the pressure in the blood vessels as your heart rests between beats.

For the best reading, skip smoking and caffeine thirty minutes before the test.

Know your numbers

Your blood pressure can change by the day, hour and minute! So if your number is high at first, your doctor will check it a few more times before diagnosing you with high blood pressure. But what number is the right number? Here's a guide:

- **Normal blood pressure:** 120 over 80*, or less.
- **High blood pressure:** 140 over 90*, or higher.
- **Low blood pressure:** 90 over 60*, or less.

Remember — the only way to know your number is to get it checked. Ask your doctor how you could best stay on top of your pressure between health visits.

*Values measured in mm of Hg.



BE WELL — For the best blood pressure reading, do not smoke or drink caffeine at least 30 minutes before testing.

Skip the salt

We all need a little salt in our diet. It helps us move our muscles, send nerve impulses ... even keep the right balance of fluids in our bodies. But if your sodium is too high, your heart has to work harder to move blood through your arteries, which puts pressure on your arteries.

- Eat more fresh foods, and less processed foods like canned vegetables, soups, lunch meat or frozen foods.
- Limit high-sodium dressing and condiments, like soy sauce and salad dressings.
- Remove salt from recipes, when possible.
- Use lemon juice, dried herbs, fruit zest or basil to flavor your food instead of salt or salt substitutes (which do contain salt).
- Read food labels – and stay on the lower range of the 1,500-2500 mg. per day serving recommendation.

Keep in mind that a little salt isn't a little sodium. Just one teaspoon of salt equals 2,325 milligrams. That's a whole day's worth!

Adopt healthy habits

You can't control all of your risks for blood pressure, like age, race or family history. But you can control others. Some tips:

- **Follow doctor's orders:** See your doctor regularly, and take the medicine he or she has prescribed.
- **Keep your heart pumping:** Exercise can cut your risk of heart disease, stroke and more. And it can help you lose weight, which is another way to help your heart. So aim for 30 minutes a day of brisk exercise.
- **Kick the stick:** Just one year after quitting, your risk of heart disease will drop by more than half.
- **Relax:** When you stress out, your blood pressure does too. Instead of relaxing with a cigarette, food or alcohol, try deep breathing or relaxation methods.
- **Drop the weight:** If you are overweight, your blood works harder to get oxygen and nutrients to your tissues — putting higher pressure on the walls of your arteries. The key? Diet and exercise.
- **Pass the potassium:** This little nutrient helps you balance the amount of sodium in your blood. So don't forget to put potassium on your plate!

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Know the warning signs

The signs of high blood pressure aren't always obvious. But sometimes, they are glaring. Go to the hospital **right away** if you have any of these symptoms:

- Severe headache
- Changes in vision
- Chest pain, pressure or tightness
- Short of breath or hard time breathing
- Numbness or tingling in the face, arms or legs
- Trouble speaking or understanding
- Trouble swallowing

Take action on your high blood pressure. Resolution to make lifestyle changes, no matter how small, will make a big difference.

Sources:

High Blood Pressure. Developed through a partnership of The Ohio State University Medical Center, Mount Carmel Health and OhioHealth, Columbus, Ohio. Available for use as a public service without copyright restrictions at www.healthinfotranslations.com

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