

Blood Pressure – Why It’s Important and What You Can Do About It**Health risks of high blood pressure:**

High blood pressure puts you at increased risk for stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease, even blindness. Those with pre-hypertension are twice as likely to develop coronary artery disease, and more than three times as likely to have a heart attack, as well as being likely to progress to hypertension. About 30% of American adults have hypertension and another 30% are thought to have pre-hypertension. Millions of them don’t know they have a problem. You should do all you can to keep your blood pressure as low as possible.

What your blood pressure numbers mean:

| CATEGORY | SYSTOLIC | DIASTOLIC |
|---|----------------|-------------------|
| Normal | Less than 120 | And less than 80 |
| Pre-hypertension | 120-139 | or 80-89 |
| Stage 1 hypertension | 140-159 | or 90-99 |
| Stage 2 hypertension | 160 and higher | or 100 and higher |
| Note: Blood pressure is expressed as two numbers, such as 120/80. The first number is called systolic (the maximum pressure on blood vessels during a heart contraction; the second, diastolic (the lowest pressure, between heartbeats.) | | |

What can you do?

Know your blood pressure. Be sure to ask and write it down. Have your blood pressure checked as often as your doctor recommends. Take your medications as directed and report any side effects.

Eat 4-5 cups of fruits and vegetables a day. A large, long term study from the University of Minnesota found those with the highest intakes of plant foods cut their risk of hypertension by 36%. Another found that people with the highest intakes of fiber from fruits, vegetables and whole grains had around a 30 % reduced risk of hypertension compared to those with the lowest intakes.

Slash sodium. The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends reducing salt intake to about 1,500 mg a day, both for people with and without hypertension. Reduced sodium intake lowers the risk of hypertension by about 20%. More than 75% of the salt we eat comes from processed foods, so read labels carefully.

Pump up potassium. High potassium intake is associated with lower blood pressure in people with and without hypertension. The AHA recommends getting 4,700 mg a day, ideally from 4-5 cups of fruits and vegetables every day. That level may be too high for people with congestive heart failure or impaired kidney function; those people should talk to their doctors about potassium intake.

Imbibe lightly, if at all. Numerous studies have shown that light to moderate drinking (one drink a day or fewer for women, two for men) MAY have some blood pressure-lowering effects, but any more than that has adverse effects.

Maintain a healthy weight. Weight loss lowers blood pressure even before the desired body weight is reached - the greater the weight loss, the greater the reduction in blood pressure.

Exercise at least 30 minutes most, if not all, days. Aerobic exercise helps lower blood pressure. Three 10 minute bouts of walking, cycling, swimming, or other aerobic exercise works as well as one 30 minute session.