

# High Blood Pressure

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## WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

**H**igh blood pressure (hypertension) increases the risk of dangerous health problems, such as heart attacks and strokes. Doctors measure blood pressure using two numbers, such as 120/80. The first number shows the surge of pressure in the arteries with every heartbeat (systolic blood pressure or SBP), and the second number shows the pressure between beats (diastolic blood pressure or DBP). If either one of these numbers is too high, blood pressure can be dangerous.<sup>1</sup>

Classification	SBP	DBP
Normal	<120	and <80
Prehypertension	120-139	or 80-89
Stage 1 Hypertension	140-159	or 90-99
Stage 2 Hypertension	>160	or >100

Bringing blood pressure under control is very important, and treatment often involves taking medication. However, changing the way you eat can bring your blood pressure down and may help reduce the need for medication.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO CONTROL MY BLOOD PRESSURE?

### Reduce salt in your diet.

**C**utting down on salt helps reduce blood pressure. Here are some tips for cutting the salt in your diet:

- Use less and less salt in cooking. Your taste will soon adjust.
- Avoid adding salt to foods at the table.
- Learn to prepare food with different spices and seasonings, such as fresh garlic, onion, or cilantro.
- Avoid salty snacks, such as potato chips.
- Avoid canned foods with added sodium (salt).
- Choose low-sodium (low-salt) varieties of canned soups and vegetables, or fresh or frozen vegetables, which are naturally low in sodium.
- Limit foods that are packed in brine, such as pickles and olives, and high-sodium condiments, such as soy sauce, ketchup, mustard, and barbeque sauce.

### Read the “Nutrition Facts” label.

**T**he amount of sodium (salt) in a food product is listed on the nutrition facts label. The following label claims can be placed on a food package to tell you if the product is low in salt:

- *Low Sodium*—contains 140 mg or less sodium per serving
- *Very Low Sodium*—contains 35 mg or less sodium per serving
- *Sodium Free*—contains less than 5 mg of sodium per serving

### Choose more vegetarian foods.

**P**eople who follow vegetarian diets typically have lower blood pressure.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

No one knows exactly why these foods work so well, but it is probably because cutting out meat, dairy products, and added fats reduces the blood’s viscosity (or “thickness”) which, in turn, brings down blood pressure.<sup>5</sup> Plant products are generally lower in fat and sodium and have no cholesterol at all. Vegetables and fruits are also rich in potassium, which helps lower blood pressure.

Try following a vegetarian diet for four to six weeks to find out how well these foods will work for you. Then have your doctor check your blood pressure. Pure vegetarian diets—diets that do not contain any meat, chicken, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy, or animal fat—are generally adequate in all nutrients except vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, which is found in fortified cereals, such as Product 19 and Total, or any common multivitamin.

Include more of the following foods that are naturally low in sodium in your diet:

- *Whole grains*—brown rice, whole wheat bread or pasta, unsweetened hot or cold cereal, millet, barley, buckwheat groats, and quinoa
- *Beans/legumes*—dried (not canned) black-eyed peas, kidney beans, pinto beans, lentils, navy beans, chickpeas, soy milk, textured vegetable protein, and tofu
- *Vegetables*—fresh or frozen varieties, such as broccoli, mustard greens, collard greens, kale, spinach, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, squash, and corn
- *Fruits*—fresh or frozen varieties, such as bananas, oranges,

apples, pears, grapefruit, strawberries, mango, papaya, guava, strawberries, and blueberries

### **Lower your weight.**

**A**voiding fatty foods, such as animal products and fried foods, and increasing the use of whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and beans helps reduce weight. In turn, this helps bring down blood pressure. As an added benefit, losing weight reduces your risk of diabetes, heart problems, joint problems, some cancers, and other conditions. If you have a significant weight problem, be sure to consult with your doctor about the best ways for you to lose weight.

### **Limit alcohol use.**

**A**lcohol can raise blood pressure and it helps to limit alcohol to no more than one to two alcoholic drinks per day (beer and wine count as drinks).

### **Become more physically active.**

**E**xercise can help bring down your blood pressure. A typical healthy exercise schedule would include a brisk walk for a half-hour each day or one hour three times per week. Since exercise puts added strain on your heart, be sure to check with your doctor first about the best way for you to become more

physically active.

### **Avoid tobacco.**

**L**ower blood pressure is one of the many good reasons to quit smoking.

Let your doctor know you are concerned about your blood pressure and want to use foods to help bring it under control. High blood pressure is dangerous, so, let your doctor guide you as to when and if your need for medication has changed.

### **References**

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