

Controlling Blood Pressure

What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of blood vessels in the body. When blood pressure is measured it is recorded as two numbers, for example, 124/80.

- The **top number** is called systolic pressure. This is the pressure of blood pushing against blood vessels when the heart beats. This number should be **around 120**.
- The **bottom number** is called diastolic pressure. This is the pressure of blood pushing against blood vessels when the heart is relaxed between beats. This number should be **around 80**.

You have **high blood pressure (hypertension)** if your top number is always above 140 or your bottom number is always above 90.

You have **high normal blood pressure** if your top number is always between 130 and 139 or your bottom number is always between 85 and 89. Most people with high normal blood pressure will develop high blood pressure later. Some people can stop this from happening by making the lifestyle changes in this handout.

Target blood pressures

- Most people: less than 140/90
- People with **diabetes or chronic kidney disease**: less than 130/80

Why be concerned about high blood pressure?

When your blood pressure is high the heart has to pump harder than it should. This can lead to:

- Heart and kidney disease because blood vessels can become damaged.
- A lack of blood flow to the brain. This can lead to a loss of memory, concentration and judgment.

What increases blood pressure?

Family history

High blood pressure is common in some families.

Overweight

Being overweight can make your heart pump harder to push the blood through your body. This increases blood pressure.

Not enough physical activity

People who do not get enough physical activity have higher heart rates. This increases blood pressure.

Too much alcohol

Drinking more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day for men or 1 alcoholic drink a day for women can damage heart muscles and increase blood pressure.

Eating habits

Eating too many salty foods and not enough vegetables, fruit and low fat milk and alternatives can increase blood pressure.

Smoking

The nicotine in cigarettes shrinks the inside of your blood vessels, making less space for your blood to flow through. This makes your heart beat faster and increases your blood pressure.

Stress

For some individuals, stress can increase blood pressure.

What lowers blood pressure?

Is your blood pressure above 120/80? Read the list below to find out what you can do to lower it.

✓ Eat more healthy foods

Eating more vegetables, fruit and low fat milk and alternatives may lower your blood pressure by **6 to 11 points**.



✓ Go for a walk

Getting 30 to 60 minutes a day of any physical activity, like brisk walking, may lower your blood pressure by **4 to 5 points**.



✓ Lose extra weight

For every 10 pounds (4.5 kg) of weight you lose, your blood pressure may drop by **4 to 5 points**.

✓ Use less sodium (salt)

Limiting sodium to 2,300 mg (1 tsp salt) or less per day may lower your blood pressure by **5 to 6 points**.



✓ Limit alcohol

Limiting alcohol to 2 or less drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women may lower your blood pressure by **3 to 4 points**.

✓ Quit smoking

If you smoke, quit. Try to live and work in smoke-free places.

What do I need to do to lower my blood pressure?

✓ Eat more healthy foods

Eat more of the foods that can help lower your blood pressure.

1. Write down what you ate yesterday.
2. Compare what you ate yesterday to the list below. Did you eat enough of the foods below?
 - **4 to 5 servings of vegetables, fresh or frozen**
1 serving equals: 1 cup raw leafy vegetables, 1 medium tomato or potato, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup green beans or carrots, or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vegetable juice.
 - **4 to 5 servings of fruit, fresh, canned in juice or frozen**
1 serving equals: 1 medium fruit, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup applesauce or berries, or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup 100% pure fruit juice (maximum 1 cup or 250 mL juice per day).
 - **3 servings of low fat milk and milk alternatives**
1 serving equals: 1 cup 1% or skim milk, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup low fat yogurt (175 g), 1 cup fortified soy beverage

It takes some planning to eat this many fruits, vegetables and low fat milk and alternatives. Keep reading for some tips to help you eat better.

How to eat more tasty food

To help lower your blood pressure use the 3 tips below. These tips will help you eat all the fruit, vegetables and low fat milk and milk alternatives you need in a day.

1. At lunch and supper, eat 1 cup (250 mL) of cooked or raw vegetables, or 2 cups (500 mL) of green leafy vegetables. This equals 4 servings of vegetables.
2. Have 1 piece of fruit for breakfast. Pack 2 pieces of fruit and 1 small handful of dried fruit for lunch and snacks. This equals 4 servings of fruit.
3. Drink 1 cup (250 mL) of 1%, skim milk or fortified soy beverage with your breakfast, lunch and supper. This equals 3 servings of low fat milk products.

More tasty tips to add healthy food to your day

- ✓ At supper fill half your plate with raw, cooked or green leafy vegetables.
- ✓ Pack 1 cup (250 mL) raw vegetables to snack on during the day. Cut up 1 big green pepper or 2 big carrots.
- ✓ Mix together 1 container of low fat yogurt and $\frac{1}{2}$ can of fruit such as pears.
- ✓ Add fresh or frozen vegetables to spaghetti sauce, soup, stew, chili, or casseroles.
- ✓ Eat beans, lentils or a small handful of nuts or seeds at lunch instead of meat.
- ✓ Eat 2 servings of fish a week.

Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)

The “DASH” diet is based on Canada’s Food Guide.

The DASH diet can lower blood pressure by **6 to 11 points**. The DASH diet is:

- **high** in fruits, vegetables daily, nuts, legumes (beans and lentils) and low fat milk products
- **low** in saturated fat, cholesterol and total fat
- **low** in sweets and snack foods that are high in fat, sugar or salt.

For more information on the DASH diet, please go to:
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash>

✓ Go for a walk

Physical activity helps to control your blood pressure.

Be active at least 4 days a week for 30 to 60 minutes. You do not have to do it all at once. You can be active for 10 minutes at a time, 3 times a day.

Do activities that make you breathe a little faster. Some examples are brisk walking, dancing, swimming, and biking.

Who has the time?

Use the tips below to slowly increase your activity level to 30 to 60 minutes each day.

- ✓ Go for a 10 minute walk after meals.
- ✓ Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- ✓ Make time for a new activity by watching less TV.
- ✓ Walk on a treadmill when you watch TV.
- ✓ Take an exercise class like yoga, dancing or aquasize. Do this with a friend to help you stay active.

Use a pedometer to count your steps

A pedometer counts the number of steps you take. Add more steps each day until you are getting **at least 10,000 steps**.

How active are you?

Keep track of how many steps you take everyday. Use the guide below to see how active you are.

0 to 5000 steps	→	Not active
5000 to 7500 steps	→	Low active
7500 to 10,000 steps	→	Medium active
10,000 to 12,500 steps	→	Active
12,500 or more steps	→	Highly active

Note: Before you start a new physical activity program, talk to your doctor to make sure it is safe for you.

✓ Lose extra weight

Ask your doctor or Registered Dietitian if you are at a healthy weight or a normal Body Mass Index (BMI).

If your waist measure is high you are at higher risk for high blood pressure. For men this is more than 40 inches (102 cm); for women, it is more than 35 inches (88 cm).

If you are overweight, a small weight loss can lower your blood pressure.

A healthy weight loss is no more than 2 pounds (1 kg) per week. Talk to your doctor or dietitian about setting a goal for healthy weight loss.

✓ Use less sodium (salt)

Try to limit the sodium you eat to 2300 mg or less per day.

Sodium is found naturally in all foods. Salt is made from sodium.

Processed and packaged foods are high in salt and sodium. Eat less of these foods to help lower your blood pressure.

Some examples are:

- Pickles, canned vegetables, tomato sauces and canned and packaged soups
- Sandwich meats like bologna and ham and sausage style meats
- Ketchup, soy sauce, mustard and BBQ sauce
- Salty snack foods like potato chips and pretzels
- Regular cheeses and crackers

Tips to lower the amount of sodium you eat

- ✓ Do not use salt at the table.
- ✓ If salt, sodium or soda is listed in the first three ingredients on a food label - pick a different food.
- ✓ Read the Nutrition Facts table on food labels. Choose foods with the least amount of sodium in one serving.
- ✓ Limit how often you eat out. Fast food and restaurant meals can be very high in sodium.

✓ Limit alcohol

If you choose to drink, do not drink more than 2 drinks per day for men or 1 drink per day for women.

1 drink is equal to 1 bottle (375 mL) beer, 5 oz (150 mL) wine or 1 ½ oz (45 mL) hard liquor.

Discuss the use of alcohol with your doctor.

✓ Reduce or stop smoking

When you quit smoking for a year, your risk of heart disease is 50% less than a smoker's risk.

Contact your doctor or HEALTHLink Alberta at 780-408-LINK (5465) for ideas to help you quit smoking.

✓ Learn ways to manage stress

Think about one thing that helps you to feel relaxed when you are stressed.

Talk to your friends or doctor about ideas to help you cope with stress.

✓ Talk to your doctor

Take your high blood pressure pills every day. Get your blood pressure checked regularly.

If you have high normal blood pressure (130 to 139/85 to 89) it is important to have your doctor check your blood pressure every year.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist if the vitamins, herbs or medications you are taking can increase your blood pressure.

✓ Set a goal to lower your blood pressure

Focus on making small changes to help lower your blood pressure. Write down one small lifestyle change you can make each week. Over time, these small changes will add up and help to lower your blood pressure.