

Weight Control When You Have High Blood Pressure

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against artery walls as the heart pumps blood through the body. You may be told that you have high blood pressure (hypertension) if your blood pressure is higher than normal. Blood pressure can be unhealthy if it is 120/80 or above. The higher your blood pressure, the greater the health risk. High blood pressure is a problem in many ways.

- Your heart has to work harder to pump blood through your body. The added workload on the heart causes thickening of the heart muscle. Over time, the thickening damages the heart muscle so that it can no longer pump normally. This can lead to a disease called heart failure.
- The higher pressure in your arteries may cause them to weaken and bleed, resulting in a stroke.
- As you get older, blood vessels may get hard and stiff. Fatty deposits called plaque build up in blood vessels and make them more narrow. The narrowing decreases the amount of blood flow to the body. Small pieces of plaque may break off from the wall of a blood vessel and completely block a smaller blood vessel. This can cause a stroke or a heart attack. Your kidneys and eyes may also be damaged. High blood pressure speeds up this process.

How is high blood pressure affected by weight?

Blood pressure rises as body weight increases. Losing 5 to 10% of your total body weight can decrease your health risks. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, losing 10 to 20 pounds may lower your blood pressure and reduce your risks for heart disease and stroke.

What can I do to control my weight?

Change your eating habits so that you lose 1 to 2 pounds a week until you reach a healthy weight. Your diet needs to be low in fat, cholesterol, and salt. Be careful about serving sizes and how many calories you eat.

A regular exercise program can help you lose weight or keep a normal weight because it:

- Burns calories
- Reduces stress and helps you feel better and sleep better
- Lowers your cholesterol and blood sugar levels

Ask your healthcare provider for a diet and exercise program that is right for you.

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow the treatment plan prescribed by your healthcare provider.
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals that reduce the calories in your diet enough for you to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week.
- Reduce the salt, fat, cholesterol, and caffeine in your diet. The DASH diet may help lower your blood pressure. This diet is low in fat, cholesterol, red meat, sweets, and salt. It is not a weight loss diet, but it can lead to weight loss if your servings are not too big.
- Try to eat smaller servings of high calorie foods and eat more vegetables and fruits.
- Use the following guides to help you judge healthy serving sizes:
 - 1 cup of grains is about the size of your fist.
 - 3 to 4 ounces of meat is the size of a deck of cards or the palm of your hand.
 - 1 and 1/2 ounces of low-fat or fat-free cheese equals 4 stacked dice.
 - 1 tablespoon is about the size of your thumb.
 - 1 teaspoon is about the size of the tip of your thumb.
- Look for healthy heart cookbooks. The American Heart Association Low-Salt Cookbook has lots of low-sodium, low-fat and lower calorie recipes.
- Exercise regularly, according to your healthcare provider's instructions.
- Learn to use deep breathing and relaxation techniques to reduce stress.
- See your provider regularly to have your blood pressure checked. You might want to buy a home blood-pressure monitor.
- Don't drink a lot of juice or soda.
- If you smoke, try to quit.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink. Women should have no more than 1 drink a day and men no more than 2 drinks per day. A drink equals 12 ounces of regular beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 and 1/2 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits such as whiskey or vodka.

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