

Let's Talk About High Blood Pressure



Many people older than 65 have hypertension, or high blood pressure. Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries—the tubes that bring fresh blood to your heart and to your body.

Blood pressure goes up and down during the day. When it stays up, that is high blood pressure. High blood pressure makes your heart work harder. High blood pressure is known as a “silent” killer because many people don't know they have it. The only way to know for sure is to have your blood pressure checked.

Who Is At Risk for High Blood Pressure?

If you are over 65, you should have your blood pressure checked every year during your regular exam, or more often if you have high blood pressure or your doctor tells you to.

What Is “Normal” Blood Pressure?

You measure blood pressure with two numbers—one that measures when your heart beats over the number that measures when your heart relaxes.

A blood pressure of 140/90 is high.

If your pressure is 120/80, it is normal but on the border of being too high.

Your doctor may prescribe a blood pressure medication if needed. If you start taking a medicine for high blood pressure, keep taking it unless your doctor tells you to stop. Here are some ideas to help you remember to take your medicine:

- Take it at meal time or before bed
- Take it at the same time every day
- Use plastic pill boxes from the drug store that help you keep track of when to take your medicine

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You are more likely to have high blood pressure if:

- Someone in your family has it
- You don't exercise
- You are overweight
- You have diabetes
- You drink too much alcohol
- You eat too much salt
- You have stress

How Can I Lower My Blood Pressure?

Making changes to what you eat and how much you exercise can lower your blood pressure:

- **Exercise regularly.** Talk to your doctor before exercising. Some ways to exercise more include taking a walk every day or joining an exercise class.
- **Eat a diet low in fat.** Try not to eat fried foods and limit pork and beef. Instead, eat broiled, baked, or grilled fish, chicken, or turkey. Use low-fat milk and cheese.
- **Stop smoking.** Talk to your doctor if you need help to quit smoking.
- **Cut back on salt.** Use herbs, spices, vinegar, or salt-free blends to flavor your food. Avoid frozen food and canned soups.
- **Lose extra weight.** Become more active and cut down on the amount of fat in your diet. Eat 5–9 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Read food labels and control your portions. Here are some examples of serving sizes: 1/2 cup rice or pasta; 1 small piece of fruit; 3/4 cup fruit juice; 1 cup of milk; 2 ounces of cheese (about the size of a domino); 1–3 ounces of meat, poultry, or fish (about the size of a deck of cards).
- **Eat more fruits and vegetables.** Snack on fruits and vegetables instead of chips, cookies, and other high-fat foods.
- **Add potassium to your diet.** High-potassium foods include chicken, turkey, fish, bananas, oranges, spinach, and tomatoes.
- **Cut back on alcohol.** Limit your alcohol to 1 to 2 drinks a day.
- **Seek treatment for stress or anxiety.** Talk to your doctor if you feel tense and irritable and it doesn't go away, or if you can't shake a feeling of worry or guilt.

