

High Blood Pressure

What you need to know



You have the power to lower your blood pressure and live a healthy, full life. High blood pressure, which is also called hypertension, raises your risk for heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and eye damage.

Eat less salt

Lower your blood pressure by eating less salt, which is called sodium on food labels. Eat no more than 2300 mg of sodium each day, which is less than a teaspoon. Less than 1500 mg a day is best.

Most of the sodium we eat comes from packaged or restaurant foods. You might be surprised at the large amounts in bread, packaged foods, cheese, processed meats and cold cuts, pasta dishes, sauces and salty snacks.

How to read a food label:

1. Look at the serving size and servings per container. This item has 2 servings.
2. Look at the mg of sodium. In this can, a 1 cup serving has 400mg of sodium. This whole can has 800mg of sodium.



What do your blood pressure numbers mean?

157 / 98

Systolic—upper number:

The pressure when the heart squeezes to pump blood to the body

Diastolic—bottom number:

The pressure when the heart relaxes and fills with blood

BLOOD PRESSURE	SYSTOLIC	DIASTOLIC
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
Elevated blood pressure	120-129	
High blood pressure	130 or higher	80 or higher

Write your recent numbers here: ____ / ____

IMPORTANT NOTE: Always contact your nurse or doctor if your systolic pressure is above 180 or if your diastolic pressure is above 110.

✓ Check off the things you will do:

- Check food labels for sodium levels.
- Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Use herbs and spices instead of salt.
- Use water to rinse canned foods like vegetables, beans and tuna to remove salty liquid.
- For salads, choose oil and vinegar. When eating out, ask for dressing on the side.
- Choose reduced sodium, low sodium, light sodium, or sodium-free foods.

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Check your blood pressure at home

Checking your blood pressure at home will help your nurse or doctor know if your numbers are normal or high. Ask your doctor or nurse to help you find a home blood pressure monitor. Don't use finger or wrist monitors.

The first time you take your blood pressure at home, do it on both arms. After that, use the arm that had the highest numbers.

How to check your blood pressure:

1. Use a cuff that fits your arm (example: adult, large, or extra large). Ask your doctor or nurse what size to use.
2. Rest for 5 minutes before you take your blood pressure.
3. Wait for at least 30 minutes after drinking alcohol or caffeine, smoking or exercising before you take a reading.
4. Sit with your legs uncrossed, your back supported, and your feet on the floor. Rest your arm at heart level on a table.
5. Take your blood pressure twice a day for 7 days. Save your numbers on the machine or write them down to show to your nurse or doctor.



Learn about your medicines

Most people with high blood pressure need at least 2 medicines to lower their blood pressure to a healthy level.

Your doctor or nurse may need to change your medicines to find what works best for you. This is normal.



Check off the things you will do:

- Ask your doctor or nurse if there is a best time to take your medicines, like before or after a meal, in the morning, or at night.
- Always use a pill box, even if you only take one pill each day. Make sure your pill box is stored in a place where you can see it.
- Take your pills at the same time each day. Use a timer or alarm on your watch or phone as a reminder.
- Write down your medicines and always carry this list with you. Show it to your doctor or nurse at each visit.
- Write down on your calendar when you need to refill your medicine—at least 1-2 weeks before you run out.
- If you don't feel well after taking a medicine, call your doctor or nurse.
- Don't stop taking your medicines until you talk with your doctor or nurse.

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