

# Healthy Blood Pressure for Healthy Hearts

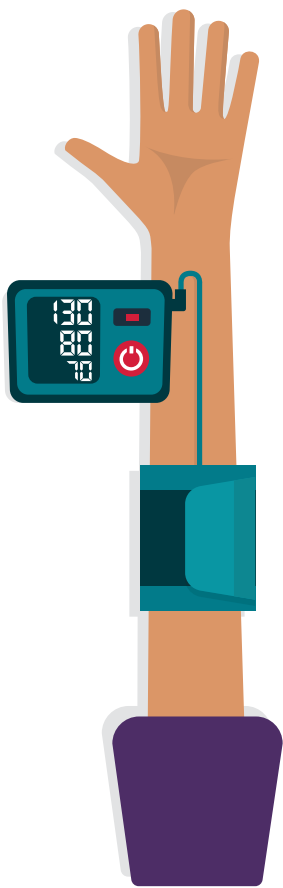
## Small Steps To Take Control



Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Proverbs 4:23

Every time your heart beats, it pumps blood through vessels, called arteries, to the rest of your body. Your blood pressure is how hard your blood pushes against the walls of the arteries. If your blood flows at higher than normal pressures, you may have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension.

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the United States. Millions of Americans have high blood pressure, but many people who have it don't know it. That's why it is important to have your blood pressure checked at least once a year.



### High blood pressure is a "silent killer."

It doesn't usually cause symptoms, but it can damage your body over time.

- If your blood pressure stays higher than 130/80 mm Hg for a period of time, it can cause serious health problems such as:
  - Heart disease
  - Stroke
  - Kidney disease
  - Dementia
- The only way to know whether you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure measured—a process that is simple and painless.
- If you find out you have high blood pressure, a health care professional can tell you how to prevent serious complications, including disability and premature death.

### Some things put us at greater risk for high blood pressure.



**Age:** Blood pressure tends to get higher as we get older. But it can affect many of us when we're younger too.



**Genes:** High blood pressure often runs in families.



**Sex:** Before age 60, more men than women have high blood pressure. After age 60, more women than men have it.



**Race or ethnicity:** While anyone can have high blood pressure, African Americans tend to get it at a younger age. Among Hispanic adults, people of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican backgrounds are at higher risk.



**Lifestyle habits:** Eating too much salt, drinking too much alcohol, being obese, smoking, and not getting enough exercise can raise our blood pressure.

## What steps can you take to lower your blood pressure?

### Set targets

Work with your doctor to set blood pressure numbers that are healthy for you. Use our worksheet at [nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension](http://nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension) to track your progress.

### Take control

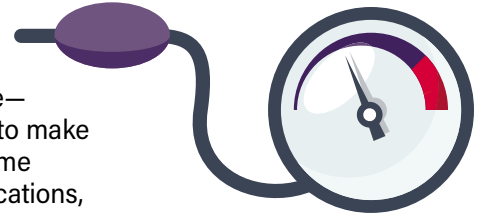
Make lifestyle changes such as eating healthy, staying active, and watching your weight. If you smoke, quitting can help prevent heart disease and other complications of high blood pressure.

### Work together

Studies show that if you engage in heart healthy activities with people at home, at work, in your community, or online, you have a better chance of staying motivated.

## Taking the first step toward a healthy blood pressure.

**Making lifestyle changes now** can help keep your blood pressure in a healthy range—whether you have high blood pressure or you're trying to prevent it. You don't have to make big changes all at once. Small steps can get you where you want to go. Here are some ideas to start. If you have elevated blood pressure and your doctor prescribes medications, make sure to take them as directed.



### Why should I change?



#### Eat Healthy Foods

A diet **low in sodium and saturated fat**—like the DASH eating plan—can lower your blood pressure as effectively as medicines.



#### Move More

**Get at least 2½ hours of physical activity a week** to help lower and control blood pressure. That's just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.



#### Aim for a Healthy Weight

**Losing just 3 to 5 percent of your weight** can improve your blood pressure. If you weigh 200 lbs., that's a weight loss of 6 to 10 lbs.



#### Manage Stress

**Stress can contribute** to high blood pressure and other heart risks. If it goes on for a long time, it can make your body store more fat.



#### Stop Smoking

The **chemicals in tobacco smoke** can harm your heart and blood vessels. Quitting is hard. But many people have done it, and you can, too.

### How can I change?

- Add **one fruit or vegetable** to every meal.
- If you get fast food, ask for a **salad instead of fries**.
- Give **Meatless Monday** a try.
- Commit to **one salt-free day a week**. Use herbs for flavor instead.
- Invite a colleague for **regular walks or an exercise class**.
- Give the elevator a day off and **take the stairs**.
- Take a break to **play outside** with your kids.
- March in place** during commercial breaks while watching television with your family.
- Join a **weight loss program** with a buddy.
- Sign "social support" agreements** with three family members or friends.
- Practice **mindful meditation** for 10 minutes a day.
- Share a **funny video, joke, or inspirational quote** with a friend.
- Talk with your doctor** if you have trouble managing stress on your own
- Visit **Smokefree.gov** or **BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov** to connect with others trying to quit.
- Sign up for a **support group** at work or your local clinic.
- Join a **sewing, knitting, or woodworking group** to keep your hands busy when you get urges.

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**Take control of your blood pressure today! Learn more at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension)**