



UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA

EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## Living Well to Keep Your Pressure Down<sup>1</sup>

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### Am I at Risk for High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure, or hypertension, can cause serious health problems. It makes your heart work harder and damages your blood vessels. That's why it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. You are at higher risk for high blood pressure if you:

- ❖ have a family history of high blood pressure
- ❖ are a man over age 40
- ❖ are a woman past menopause
- ❖ are African American
- ❖ are obese
- ❖ are physically inactive



### Can I Decrease My Risk?

Yes, you **can** decrease your risk of getting high blood pressure! Look at these five guidelines. They can help you control your blood pressure and reduce your health risks.

- ① Aim for a healthy weight.
- ② Be physically active each day.

- ③ Choose and prepare foods with less salt.
- ④ Eat at least five fruits and vegetables every day.
- ⑤ If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.



Following these guidelines will help keep you healthy. Your family also will benefit if they follow these guidelines. Let's see how you can apply them to your life.

### Aim for a Healthy Weight

#### Why Worry about Body Weight?

As body weight increases, blood pressure tends to rise. If you are overweight, you can reduce your risk of high blood pressure by losing weight. Even losing a few pounds can help prevent high blood pressure. If you are overweight and already have high blood pressure, losing weight can help lower it.

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## What Is a Healthy Weight for Me?

There are charts that you can use to see if your weight is in a healthy range. You can also think of a healthy weight as one at which you feel good, and you are at low risk for disease. A healthy weight for you is one that you can maintain with a positive lifestyle. Ask yourself:



- Is my blood pressure normal?
- Is my blood cholesterol normal?
- Is my blood sugar normal?
- Can I do moderate exercise comfortably?
- Can I maintain my weight without severe dieting?
- Do I eat a variety of healthful foods in moderation?
- Do I feel healthy?

If you answered “yes” to each question, then you probably are at a healthy weight for you. If you answered “no” to one or more questions, then your weight may be putting you at risk for high blood pressure and other conditions. You may want to discuss your overall health with your doctor and see if she/he has any suggestions.

You can get more information about healthy eating for weight management from your county Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent. Check to see what programs are available in your county.

A great way to start living a healthy lifestyle is to be more active. This section provides tips on how to include physical activity in your life. This will reduce your risk for high blood pressure and help keep you healthy.

## Be physically active each day

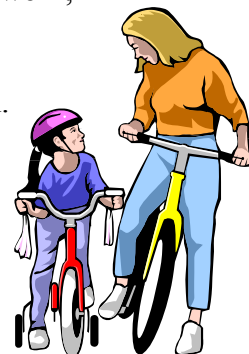
Here are a few of the benefits of being an active person. Check those that are important to you.

- Maintain normal blood pressure
- Maintain normal blood cholesterol
- Decrease risk of heart attack, stroke, cancer, and diabetes
- Help maintain healthy weight
- Increase energy level
- Enhance sense of well being

## How Much Exercise Should I Do?

You don't have to be a marathon runner to benefit from physical activity! Even light activities, if done daily, can help lower your risk of high blood pressure. To increase your activity, start doing some of these:

- ✓ Use stairs instead of elevators.
- ✓ Get off the bus one or two stops early and walk the rest of the way.
- ✓ Park at the back of the parking lot.
- ✓ Ride a bike to the store, to work, or just for fun!
- ✓ Work in the yard or garden.
- ✓ Go dancing or clean the house to your favorite lively music!
- ✓ Play actively with your children.



More vigorous exercise has added benefits. It helps improve the fitness of the heart and lungs.

And that protects you more against heart disease.



Activities like swimming, brisk walking, running, bicycling, and jumping rope are "aerobic." Aerobic activities require oxygen. They condition your heart and lungs if done at the right intensity for at least 30

minutes, three to four times a week.

If you don't have 30 minutes, find two 15-minute periods or even three 10-minute periods. Keep track of your activity with an activity log!

My Activity Log		
Mon. 1/24	Walked dog Played catch	15 min. 10 min.
Wed. 1/26	Gardened Walked dog	20 min. 15 min.
Thurs. 1/27	Walked up stairs Vacuumed to music	3 flights 10 min.

### Do I Need to See My Doctor First?

Most people **don't** need to see a doctor before they start exercising. A gradual, sensible exercise program has few health risks. **Do** check with your doctor first if you are going to start a **vigorous activity plan** and have any of the following:

- Chronic health problem such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, or obesity.
- High risk for heart disease:
  - ❖ personal or family history
  - ❖ smoke cigarettes
  - ❖ have a sedentary lifestyle
  - ❖ have abnormal blood lipids

- You feel dizzy or faint when you are physically active.
- You get breathless after a mild workout.
- You are a man over 40 years of age or a woman over 50.

### Choose and prepare foods with less salt

Americans eat more salt (sodium chloride) than they need. They also have higher rates of high blood pressure than people in other countries.

Often, when people with high blood pressure cut back on salt, their blood pressure falls. Cutting back on salt also can prevent blood pressure from rising in the first place. Some people, like African-Americans and the elderly, are more affected by salt than others.

There's no way to tell who will get high blood pressure when they eat too much salt. So, it's recommended that everyone keep their intake of salt moderate.

### How Much Salt or Sodium Is Recommended?

All Americans should eat no more than 6 grams (6,000 milligrams) of **salt** a day. This is about 2,400 milligrams (mg) of **sodium**, the Daily Value that you see on the Nutrition Facts label. Americans eat 4,000 to 6,000 mg of **sodium** a day, so most people need to eat less salt and sodium.

### Eat at least five fruits and vegetables every day

Eating lots of fruits and vegetables each day can help keep your blood pressure low. It can also help lower high blood pressure.

## Ways to Decrease Your Salt Intake

### At the Store

- ◆ Choose fresh, plain frozen, or canned vegetables without added salt.
- ◆ Choose fresh or frozen fish, shellfish, poultry, and meat.
- ◆ Read the Nutrition Facts label to compare the amount of sodium in processed foods like frozen dinners, soups, cereals, and sauces. Salt content can vary widely.
- ◆ Look for labels that say “low-sodium.” They contain 140 milligrams of sodium or less per serving.
- ◆ Ask your grocer or supermarket manager to offer more low-sodium foods.



### Cooking and Eating at Home

- ◆ Use little or no salt in cooking or at the table. Instead, use spices and herbs to enhance the flavor of food.

- ◆ Go easy on condiments such as soy sauce, ketchup, pickles, and olives.
- ◆ Leave the salt shaker in a cupboard!

### Eating Out

- ◆ Choose plain foods like grilled or roasted entrees. Combination dishes like stews or pasta tend to be high in salt.
- ◆ Ask to have no salt added when the food is prepared.

### Any Time

- ◆ Choose fruits and vegetables often.
- ◆ Drink water freely. It is usually very low in sodium. Check the label on bottled water for sodium content.



Source: USDA, USDHHS. *Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2000, Home and Garden Bulletin 232.




## How Many Fruits and Vegetables Do I Need to Eat?

It's recommended that we eat AT LEAST 2 servings of fruits and 3 servings of vegetables each day. More is better for decreasing risk of high blood pressure.



## How Can Fruits and Vegetables Help Keep My Blood Pressure Low?

Fruits and vegetables:

-  are naturally low in sodium
-  contain minerals like potassium that help lower blood pressure
-  are naturally low in fat and can help with weight management

Here are some tips for adding fruits and vegetables to your daily diet:

- ◆ Add fresh berries or sliced banana to your cereal in the morning.
- ◆ Snack on dried fruit like apricots, raisins, and prunes.
- ◆ Keep washed and cut up carrot and celery sticks at work and at home for a quick and healthy snack.
- ◆ Have a side salad with your lunch.
- ◆ Have a salad instead of fries when you have fast food.
- ◆ Have boxes of 100% fruit juice handy for a quick and healthy drink break.
- ◆ Have fresh fruit available in the refrigerator for a quick and healthy snack.
- ◆ Add extra fresh or frozen vegetables when you make “from scratch” or pre-packaged soups, stews, and other mixed dishes.



### If You Drink Alcoholic Beverages, Do So In Moderation

Drinking too much alcohol can lead to high blood pressure. Men should have no more than two drinks a day, and women no more than one drink per day, if they drink at all.

### What counts as a drink?

- ❖ 1½ ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits
- ❖ 5 ounces of wine
- ❖ 12 ounces of beer (regular or light)

### But Isn't Drinking Good for My Heart?

Moderate drinking may lower the risk of heart disease for some people. But there are other practices that can reduce risk of heart disease. These include eating a healthy diet, being physically active, not smoking, and maintaining a healthy weight.

### What Else Can Reduce Risk of High Blood Pressure?

There are other things you can do to help prevent high blood pressure. Let's look at a few of them.

### Get Your Minerals from Foods!

Several minerals may play a role in keeping the pressure down. These include potassium, magnesium, and calcium. Include food sources of these minerals every day.

For potassium, enjoy:

- ◆ fruits and vegetables
- ◆ fish, lean pork, or veal
- ◆ dry peas and beans (legumes)
- ◆ low-fat milk

For magnesium, enjoy:

- ◆ whole grains
- ◆ nuts and seeds
- ◆ dry peas and beans



For calcium, enjoy:

- ◆ low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese
- ◆ green leafy vegetables
- ◆ calcium-fortified foods, including orange juice, breads, and cereals



Populations with low calcium intakes have high rates of high blood pressure.

It's important to get at least the recommended amount of calcium every day from the foods you eat. If your calcium needs are high, a calcium supplement can help to meet your goal.

### Practice Stress Management.

Stress can cause your blood pressure to go up. Over time, stress may help to cause high blood pressure that can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

Stress management techniques like relaxation and meditation may not help prevent high blood pressure. But they feel good and may help you stick to an exercise or weight management program.



Follow all of these guidelines to help reduce your risk for high blood pressure. This will also lower your risk for heart disease and stroke.

### Want to Know More?

For more information on high blood pressure, weight management, or physical activity, contact:

- ❖ National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Information Center, (301) 592-8573, [Http://www.nhlbi.gov](http://www.nhlbi.gov)
- ❖ Healthfinder, from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [Http://www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)
- ❖ National Stroke Association, (800) STROKES, [Http://www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)
- ❖ 5 A Day Website: [Http://www.5aday.com](http://www.5aday.com)

Call your county Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent to see what educational programs are offered in your county. (See the Blue Pages in your telephone book, under county government.)