

Healthy Living: Changing Your Lifestyle to Improve Your Blood Pressure¹

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Most people know that high blood pressure often can be improved by making smart dietary choices and choosing foods lower in sodium. But did you know that there are other ways to help control high blood pressure and even prevent it? Read on to learn how making four lifestyle changes can help you keep blood pressure down. Who knew blood pressure control could be so easy!

Lose Weight If You Are Overweight

If you are overweight, you have a higher risk for certain chronic diseases and conditions such as high blood pressure. The good news is that losing weight helps decrease blood pressure. To lose weight, you have to eat less calories than you burn. Healthy ways to cut back calories and stay satisfied are to:



- watch portion sizes
- eat more fruits and vegetables
- eat foods high in fiber, such as whole grains
- eat slowly and stop eating when full
- eat smaller meals more often
- include lean protein at each meal
- start meals with low calorie, filling foods such as soups and salads
- reduce the calories that you drink. Choose water, diet soda, tea and lemonade without sugar, or water with a splash of juice.

One way to know if you are overweight is to calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI). This is a measure of body fatness that takes your height and weight into account. BMI is appropriate for most healthy American men and women. On the Internet, you can go to <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/> to calculate your BMI. If you do not have access to the Internet, ask your local Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent to calculate it for you. The following table lists the BMI categories and can be used to determine if you are overweight:

< 18.5	Underweight
18.5-24.9	Normal weight
25-29.9	Overweight
≥ 30	Obesity

Increase Physical Activity

In addition to making smart food choices, it's very important to be more active. Although being active can help you lose weight, physical activity can lower blood



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pressure even if you don't lose weight! The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005, recommend 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity most days of the week for all adults to reduce the risk of chronic diseases and conditions such as high blood pressure. And you don't have to do all of this activity at once! Dividing it into three ten minute intervals is just as effective. So if 30 minutes a day is too much to start, try a 10 minute walk after breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Start slow and increase your speed and distance as you are able. Moderate-intensity physical activity includes:

- mowing the lawn
- dancing
- golf (no cart!)
- bicycling
- brisk walking
- weight lifting
- swimming



Be sure to speak with your doctor before increasing your physical activity if you have high blood pressure!



Limit Alcohol Consumption

The third lifestyle change that can help control your blood pressure is to limit the amount of alcohol that you drink. Men should limit

their alcohol intake to 2 drinks or less per day and women and lighter-weight men to 1 drink or less per day. One alcoholic drink is defined as 12 ounces of regular beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1½ ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

Stop Smoking

According to the American Heart Association, smoking is a strong risk factor

for high blood pressure. If you smoke, quitting will decrease your risk for high blood pressure, as well as heart disease, and lung and other cancers. Talk to your doctor about help with stopping. Most communities offer programs to support you while you quit and there may be some medications that help as well. Another benefit to kicking this unhealthy habit is that you'll save a lot of money. Did you know that if you quit smoking one pack of cigarettes a day you would save about \$90 in one month and over \$1000 in a year?! This would give you extra cash to enjoy more active hobbies such as dancing or gardening.

Where can I get more information?

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your county Extension office may have more written information and classes for you to attend. Also, a registered dietitian (RD) can provide reliable information to you.

For more information about high blood pressure, see *Healthy Living: High Blood Pressure (FCS8599)* on the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FY684>.

For information on how to make better dietary choices using the food label, see *Healthy Eating: Understanding the Nutrition Facts Label (FCS8883)* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FY1127>.

Reliable nutrition information may be found on the Internet at the following sites:

- <http://mypyramid.gov>
- <http://fyics.ifas.ufl.edu>
- <http://www.nutrition.gov>
- <http://www.americanheart.org>

