

Managing Your High Blood Pressure



**BlueCross
BlueShield**

Federal Employee Program.

Managing High Blood Pressure

The effects of high blood pressure can be serious, and include an increased risk for heart disease and stroke.

Even though your doctor may have prescribed medicine to treat your high blood pressure, making lifestyle changes can also help you reach your blood pressure goal. These changes include losing weight, eating a healthier diet, reducing your salt intake, exercising regularly, and limiting the amount of alcohol you drink. Each person's blood pressure goal can be different, so discuss your personal blood pressure goal with your doctor.

Lifestyle Changes

How can I manage my high blood pressure?

Find Your BMI

Talk with your doctor about an appropriate weight for your age and height. Body mass index (BMI) is an important gauge used in weight management. A BMI more than 25 is associated with high blood pressure and other health conditions. Both you and your healthcare provider should track your BMI.

Change Your Diet

It's also important to limit the fat, cholesterol and salt in your diet, and to include several servings of whole grains, fruits and vegetables daily.

Achieve these healthy eating habits by following the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet and reducing your sodium intake.

The DASH diet consists of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, poultry, nuts and low-fat dairy products. It emphasizes less red meat, sodium and sweets. This diet is endorsed by many respected health organizations including the American Heart Association (AHA). Find a complete DASH eating plan at: www.heart.org.

Reduce Your Sodium Intake

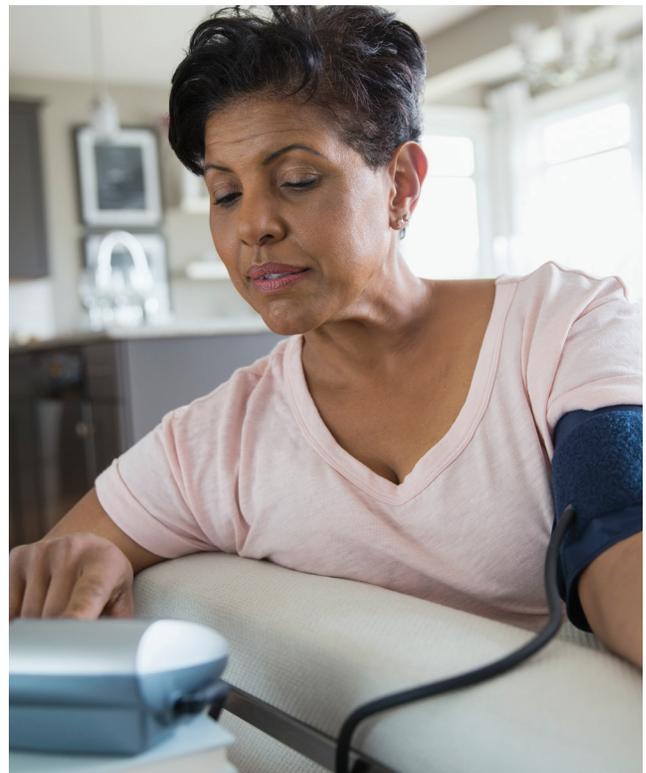
A diet high in sodium can lead to increased blood pressure. The AHA recommends a dietary sodium goal of no more than 2,300 mg daily, with an ideal limit of less than 1,500 mg per day for most adults. Even without achieving these goals, reducing sodium intake by at least 1,000 mg per day lowers blood pressure.

Even if you do not add extra salt to your meal, many foods can be high in sodium including soups, condiments, tomato sauces, canned foods and prepared meals.

When buying packaged foods, be sure to read the labels including the Nutrition Facts panel that will tell you the amount of sodium in milligrams (mg) in each serving. If you are considering using a salt substitute, talk to your healthcare provider first because it may interact with your medications.

Exercise Your Options

Just 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week can help lower blood pressure. Activities such as gardening, raking leaves, or shoveling snow can be as beneficial as regular exercise such as walking, running or swimming. Remember to talk with your doctor before starting an exercise program.



Other Lifestyle Changes

- Limit alcohol. Even if you are healthy, alcohol can raise your blood pressure. If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation.
- Don't smoke. Tobacco injures blood vessel walls and increases hardening of the arteries. If you smoke, ask your doctor to help you quit.
- Manage stress. Reduce stress as much as possible. Practice healthy coping techniques such as muscle relaxation and deep breathing.
- Monitor use of over-the-counter (OTC) medications. These may increase blood pressure and interfere with your blood pressure medications. Talk to your pharmacist before choosing OTC medications such as decongestants, herbal supplements and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (such as ibuprofen or naproxen).

Checking Blood Pressure at Home

What is the proper way to check my blood pressure at home?

The AHA recommends an automatically inflatable monitor with a cuff that is applied on the upper arm (bicep). Wrist and finger monitors should be avoided because they can be less accurate. Measure your upper arm in order to choose the appropriate size and assure that the cuff fits appropriately.

A monitor with a digital display is easier to read. Some monitors also measure heart rate, which is good information to share with your healthcare provider. Be sure to bring your blood pressure monitor to your doctor's office once a year to calibrate your machine to your doctor's equipment.

A few tips before you begin:

- Don't smoke, exercise or drink caffeinated beverages within 30 minutes before you take your blood pressure readings
- Sit down for 5 minutes before taking the reading
- Your upper arm should be bare
- Support and rest your arm at heart level
- Your back should be straight and supported
- Your feet should be flat on the floor
- Write down all of your measurements, including date and time
- Try to take your blood pressure at the same time each day
- Try to take at least two readings, about 1 minute apart

Hypertension Management Program

Blue Cross and Blue Shield Service Benefit Plan members diagnosed with hypertension may be eligible to receive a blood pressure monitor at no cost through the Hypertension Management Program.

Having a blood pressure monitor at home gives you the convenience to check your blood pressure as often as your doctor recommends and easily track your numbers, which you can share with your doctor.

To get started, visit [fepblue.org/highbloodpressure](https://www.fepblue.org/highbloodpressure) to learn more about eligibility requirements.

Blood Pressure Definitions

What do blood pressure numbers mean?

The higher number (systolic) is the pressure when the heart beats (heart muscle contracts). The lower number (diastolic) is the pressure when the heart relaxes between beats. In addition, your heart rate (or pulse) can be a useful number because it can be affected by some blood pressure medications. The average resting heart rate is 60 to 80 beats per minute, but it can vary depending on fitness and age.

Blood Pressure Goals (systolic/diastolic)

Most adults will have a blood pressure goal of less than 130/80

Ask your doctor about your individual blood pressure goal.



Medicine and Control

How important is my medicine in controlling blood pressure?

It's important to take your medication as prescribed by your doctor so that you can reach your goals and enjoy better health. If you experience side effects, talk to your doctor. It takes a team effort to treat high blood pressure successfully.

When to Call for Help

Below are general tips on when to call for help. Your doctor may have different goals for you to follow. Please review your personal plan with your doctor.

If your blood pressure reading is 180/120 or higher, wait five minutes and check it again. If it is still that high, seek medical help right away.

If your reading is 180/120 or higher and you have chest pain, shortness of breath, back pain, numbness/weakness, vision changes or trouble speaking, call 9-1-1 right away.

If your blood pressure is running lower than normal, and you are having dizziness, nausea, lightheadedness, fainting, dehydration, trouble concentrating, cold clammy pale skin, blurry vision, fast shallow breathing, fatigue or depression, let your doctor know.



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