



Take control

Blood pressure tips

There are many ways to take care of your health and heart.

One of the best ways is to keep your blood pressure under control. Studies show that the higher your blood pressure, the higher your risk for heart disease, stroke or other serious conditions. The good news is that by controlling the lifestyle choices you make each day, you can help control your blood pressure.

The facts

High blood pressure often shows no signs or symptoms — but it's a common condition that affects more and more people each year. That's why it's important for everyone to get checked regularly.

It's even more important if you have:

- A previously recorded high blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Problems with kidney function
- Heart disease
- A previous heart attack, stroke or mini-stroke
- A family history of high blood pressure

Check your blood pressure

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it checked. A nurse or your doctor will put a cuff around your upper arm and pump air into the cuff. You'll feel a slight tightening, then a release. Your blood pressure reading is one number over a second number, such as 140/85.

- **Top number:** This higher number is your systolic reading. It is the pressure in your arteries as your heart beats.
- **Bottom number:** This lower number is your diastolic reading. It is the pressure in your arteries as your heart rests between beats.

What do the numbers mean?

Here's a guide:

- **Normal blood pressure:** 130/80 or 140/90 or lower (if you have any other conditions, such as diabetes)
- **High blood pressure:** 160/100 or higher
- **Mild blood pressure:** 140/90, but below 160/100

Your pressure can vary at different times of the day and night. So if your number is high at first, your doctor will retake your blood pressure over several visits before diagnosing you with high blood pressure. He or she will also talk to you about how you can improve your risk factors.

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Controlling your blood pressure

You can't control all of your risks for blood pressure, like age, race or family history. But you can control others by changing your lifestyle. Here's how:

- **Lose weight:** If you are overweight, your blood works harder to get oxygen and nutrients to your body, putting higher pressure on the walls of your arteries.
- **Follow your doctor's advice:** See your doctor regularly, and take the medicine he or she prescribes.
- **Be active:** Exercise can lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, obesity and more. It's also a natural way to control your cholesterol. Aim for 30 minutes a day.
- **Eat a healthy diet:** The right foods can help lower your cholesterol, control your weight and provide your body with vitamins and nutrients to prevent certain diseases. So fill your plate with fruits, vegetables, lean meats and whole grains.
- **Limit salt:** Cut the amount of salt you eat to no more than 5 – 6 grams per day. Instead, try seasoning your food with lemon, orange zest or herbs.
- **Drink five or less** caffeinated drinks per day.
- **Stop smoking:** If you already have high blood pressure, tobacco increases your health risks. Ask your doctor for help if you're having trouble quitting.
- **Medication:** Keep taking your tablets for high blood pressure unless your doctor advises you to stop.

Take control of your blood pressure — get on the path to a healthier you today.

Source: High Blood Pressure (Hypertension). Available at www.patient.co.uk/health/high-blood-pressure-hypertension. Accessed 25 January 2017.

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