

Get a handle on hypertension



Hypertension is another name for high blood pressure. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly half of all U.S. adults have high blood pressure, and only about one in four of these people has their high blood pressure under control.¹

The silent killer

If your blood pressure is high, it makes your heart work harder than it should and it can lead to many major health problems.¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, high blood pressure is sometimes called the “silent killer” because it often has no warning signs or symptoms, and many people aren’t aware they have it.² This is why it’s important to have your blood pressure checked regularly.

Know your numbers

Talk to your healthcare provider to learn what your blood pressure should be and how often you need to be screened. According to the American Heart Association, blood pressure readings fit into the following categories:

Blood pressure category	Systolic (top number)		Diastolic (bottom number)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120–129	and	Less than 80
Stage 1 hypertension	130–139	or	80–89
Stage 2 hypertension	140 or higher	or	90 or higher ³

Help lower your blood pressure

In many cases, blood pressure can be controlled. There are several lifestyle changes that may help. These include:

- Keeping a healthy weight
- Staying physically active
- Eating a healthy diet that’s low in sodium
- Drinking less alcohol
- Not smoking
- Getting enough sleep
- Managing stress²

If these lifestyle changes don’t lower your blood pressure, your healthcare provider may prescribe a medication.

Learn about the DASH eating plan

Research suggests that following the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan can help lower blood pressure.⁴ This plan emphasizes whole grains, fruits, vegetables, fat-free or low-fat dairy, seafood, poultry, beans, seeds, and nuts. It limits salt and sodium, sweets and added sugars, fats, and red meat.

The DASH eating plan recommends eating a certain number of servings from eight food groups based on the number of calories you need each day, as shown below.⁴

Food group	Number of servings		
	1,600 calories	2,000 calories	2,600 calories
Grains	6 per day	6–8 per day	10–11 per day
Fruits	4 per day	4–5 per day	5–6 per day
Vegetables	3–4 per day	4–5 per day	5–6 per day
Fat-free or low-fat dairy	2–3 per day	2–3 per day	3 per day
Lean meat, poultry and fish	3–4 or less per day	6 or less per day	6 or less per day
Nuts, seeds and legumes	3–4 per week	4–5 per week	1 per day
Fats and oils	2 servings per day	2–3 per day	3 per day
Sweets and added sugars	3 or less per week	5 or less per week	Less than 2 per day

Work with your healthcare provider

Talk to your healthcare provider about which screenings you need and how often. Ask about tests for:

- High or low blood pressure
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Overall physical health

Ask your provider specific questions about high blood pressure, like:

- What can I do to manage or prevent high blood pressure?
- How do my medicines affect my blood pressure?
- How will my high blood pressure problems affect me?
- What are my treatment options?

Sources

1. "Facts about hypertension", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Last accessed Oct. 30, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/facts.htm>.
2. "High Blood Pressure and Older Adults", National Institute on Aging, Last accessed Oct. 30, 2023, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/high-blood-pressure-and-older-adults>.
3. "Understanding Blood Pressure Readings", American Heart Association, Last accessed Oct. 30, 2023, <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/understanding-blood-pressure-readings>.
4. "DASH Eating Plan", National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, Last accessed Oct. 30, 2023, <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/dash-eating-plan>.

This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor. Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.