

Health Facts: *Hypertension*



Prevention Tips

Because we don't know the cause of most cases of high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, it's hard to say how to prevent it. However, diet and lifestyle changes can be key. You should consider these tips:

- **Increase the amount of exercise you get.** Regular aerobic physical activity can enhance weight loss and reduce the risk for cardiovascular disease. You can reduce your blood pressure with moderately intense physical activity, such as a 30- to 60-minute brisk walk. If you have cardiac or other serious health issues, you should have a thorough medical evaluation, and perhaps have a cardiac stress test, before beginning any exercise program.
- **Lose weight.** Losing just 10 pounds can help lower your blood pressure. Some obese people also have sleep apnea, in which they stop breathing dozens or hundreds of times a night, snore and suffer from daytime sleepiness. Sleep apnea is linked with high blood pressure.
- **Reduce alcohol consumption.** Most men with high blood pressure shouldn't drink more than two drinks per day, and women shouldn't have more than one alcoholic drink per day. A drink is equal to 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine or one and a half ounces of 80-proof liquor.
- **Reduce stress.** When you relax, your heart rate slows, which reduces the amount of oxygen your body needs, reducing your pressure.
- **Quit smoking.** Even more than lowering your blood pressure per se, it will reduce your overall cardiovascular disease risk more than any other single move.
- **Reduce your sodium intake.** Limit sodium intake to no more than 2,300 mg per day—the amount contained in one teaspoon of salt. Check labels for sodium content and steer clear of processed foods (sauces, mixes and "instant" products such as flavored rice, cereals and pasta). Eat more vegetables that are fresh, frozen without sauce or canned with no salt. Salt substitutes may work for you, but check with your health care professional because they can be harmful if you have certain medical problems.
- **Increase dietary potassium.** An analysis of several studies indicates that potassium can reduce blood pressure. Bananas are naturally high in potassium, and the mineral can also be purchased in supplement form. For people with blood pressure values above optimal levels, national guidelines recommend increasing your dietary potassium intake to more than 3,500 mg per day—especially important if you have a high sodium intake. Increasing potassium intake is not recommended for patients with kidney disease. Ask your health care professional before increasing your potassium intake.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Aim for a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products, and low in saturated and total fat. Fish oil (omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids) and calcium supplements lower blood pressure only slightly in those with hypertension. Additionally, herbal and botanical supplements, which get very little scrutiny from the FDA, have not been proven to safely lower blood pressure and may, in fact, dangerously interact with some medications.
- **Inform your health care professional about all medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs.** It is particularly important that you mention drugs such as steroids; nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen; nasal decongestants and other cold remedies; appetite suppressants; cyclosporine; erythropoietin; antidepressants; and monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors.

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