1. Eat a better diet

Eating a heart-healthy diet is important for managing your blood pressure and reducing your risk of heart attack, heart disease, stroke and other diseases.

**Get quality nutrition from healthy food sources**

**Aim to eat a diet that's rich in:**

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole-grain, high-fiber foods
- Fat-free and low-fat (1 percent) dairy products
- Beans
- Skinless poultry and lean meats
- Fish, especially fatty fish contain omega 3 fatty acids such as salmon, trout and herring (eat at least twice a week)

**...And low in:**

- Saturated and trans fats
- Sodium

**And limit:**

- Added sugars

Be sure to work with the chefs in your household and plan together for any dietary changes that are needed. When dining out, look for healthy options.

2. Enjoy regular physical activity

Physical activity not only helps control your blood pressure, it also helps you manage your weight, strengthen your heart and manage your stress level. A healthy weight, a strong heart and general emotional health are all good for your blood pressure.

**Take charge of your activity level**

Exercise in our culture may not "just happen." When your daily routine includes hours of sitting at a desk, staying current with television shows and using countless labor-saving devices, you can easily fall into
inactivity. But taking charge of your fitness may be one of the best decisions you'll ever make. The choice is yours.

What happens if I'm inactive?

All Americans should be regularly physically active to improve overall health and fitness. People who aren't physically active are much more likely to develop health problems. Even moderately intense physical activity, such as brisk walking, is beneficial when done regularly for a total of 30 minutes or longer at least 5 days a week. Lack of physical activity increases your risk for heart attack and stroke and can contribute to obesity. On the other hand, regular physical activity helps to reduce blood pressure, control weight and reduce stress.

**AHA Recommendation**

For overall health benefits to the heart, lungs and circulation, perform any moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity using the following guidelines:

- Get the equivalent of at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity (2 hours and 30 minutes) each week.
- You can incorporate your weekly physical activity with 30 minutes a day on at least 5 days a week.
- Physical activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and preferably, it should be spread throughout the week.
- Include flexibility and stretching exercises.
- Include muscle strengthening activity at least 2 days each week.

### 3. Maintain a healthy weight

Here are some great reasons to manage your weight:

**Being overweight puts you at greater risk of developing health problems.**
Find out whether losing some weight may help you lower your blood pressure with our [High Blood Pressure Risk Calculator](#).

**A little weight loss can bring a lot of health gains!**
Did you know you may experience health benefits from losing as few as 10 pounds? Even a small weight loss can reduce blood pressure and/or prevent hypertension in many overweight people (those with a [Body Mass Index](#) of 25 or greater). BMI stands for Body Mass Index, a numerical value of your weight in relation to your height. BMIs are good indicators of healthy or unhealthy weights for adult men and women, regardless of body frame size.

**Weight loss reduces the strain on the heart.**

**Ideally, you should strive to maintain a healthy weight.**
If your doctor recommends that you lose weight, there are a variety of healthcare professionals who
can help get you on the right track. People who are slowly gaining weight can either gradually increase the level of physical activity (toward the equivalent of 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity), or reduce caloric intake, or both, until their weight is stable.

The two essentials to maintaining a healthy weight are:

- Eating well
- Moving often

If you need to lose weight, talk to your healthcare professional about a healthy approach.

4. Manage stress

In today’s fast-paced world filled with increasing demands, it's important to manage your stress level. Some people cope with stress by overeating or eating unhealthy foods, smoking, drinking and other activities that raise their risk for heart attack, stroke and high blood pressure.

Although stress is not a confirmed risk factor for either high blood pressure or heart disease, scientists continue to study how stress relates to our health. It has not been proven to cause heart disease. And while blood pressure may increase temporarily when you’re stressed, stress has not been proven to cause diagnosable high blood pressure.

How much stress do you live with and what is the cost to your health?

Stress definitely affects our bodies. In addition to the emotional discomfort we feel when faced with a stressful situation, our bodies react by releasing stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) into the blood. These hormones prepare the body for the "fight or flight response" by making the heart beat faster and constricting blood vessels to get more blood to the core of the body instead of the extremities. Constriction of blood vessels and increase in heart rate does raise blood pressure, but only temporarily; when the stress reaction goes away, blood pressure returns to its pre-stress level. This is called situational stress, and its effects are generally short-lived and disappear when the stressful event is over.

"Fight or flight" is a valuable response when we are faced with an imminent threat that we can handle by confronting or fleeing. However, our modern world contains many stressful events that we can’t handle with those options. Chronic (constant) stress causes our bodies to go into high gear on and off for days or weeks at a time. The links between chronic stress and blood pressure are not clear.

What can I do to reduce my stress?

Although stress does not clearly cause heart disease, it can play a role in general wellness. Learning new lifestyle habits sometimes requires clearing out the mental clutter. When you can turn down the stress response, you can tune in to good health. Here are some ways you can learn to be mindful about stressful situations and how you might change what is within your power to change.
5. Avoid tobacco smoke

What is the evidence?

While smoking has not been conclusively proven to cause high blood pressure, each cigarette you smoke temporarily increases your blood pressure for many minutes after you finish.

Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke have many other effects on your cardiovascular and overall health. These effects include fatty buildups in arteries, several types of cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (lung problems). Atherosclerosis (buildup of fatty substances in the arteries) is a chief contributor to the high number of deaths from smoking. Many studies detail the evidence that cigarette smoking is a major cause of coronary heart disease, which leads to heart attack.

The benefits of smoking cessation

Smoking is the most important preventable cause of premature death in the United States. For your overall health and to reduce your risk for heart attack and stroke, avoid all forms of tobacco as well as secondhand smoke.

6. Understand hot tub safety

Hot tubs and saunas pose no risk to healthy people as long as they are not misused. People with high blood pressure should tolerate saunas well as long as they are not experiencing a hypertensive crisis.

Heat from hot tubs and saunas cause blood vessels to open up (called vasodilatation.) Vasodilatation also happens during normal activities like a brisk walk. If your doctor has told you to avoid moderate exercise, you should also be careful when considering hot tubs and saunas.

People with high blood pressure should not move back and forth between cold water and hot tubs or saunas. This could cause an increase in blood pressure.

Drinking alcohol and using a sauna isn't a good combination either, so don't mix the two.

7. Comply with medication prescriptions

When your blood pressure is 140 or higher for your systolic pressure (top number) OR 90 or higher for your diastolic pressure (bottom number), your healthcare provider will likely prescribe medication in addition to lifestyle modifications. You may need more than one type of prescription medication to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.

What if I'm not comfortable taking medications?

Although it may require some adjustments, your healthcare provider has your best interest in mind. Follow your recommendations carefully, even if it means taking medication every day for the rest of your life.
Following your healthcare provider's advice is the best way to reach your treatment goals and enjoy the benefits of better health.

**What if I prefer a natural approach?**

Take prescriptions if they have been written for you. Eating a heart-healthy diet, enjoying regular physical activity and limiting alcohol should be part of your plan for lowering blood pressure - even if you're taking medication - but a healthy lifestyle may not be an alternative to medications. There is no "magic pill" that can substitute for the medications that have been carefully studied and monitored for prescription use. Follow your healthcare provider's advice.

**How can I remember to take my medicine every day?**

Don't wait for a serious health event to remind you to take your medicine! Instead, make a plan. If needed, fill a weekly medication dispenser and take your prescriptions at the same time every day, using an alarm if it helps. As you adjust to the new routine, you will see your numbers go down. Remind yourself that by managing your blood pressure, you are lowering your risk of heart attack and blood vessel diseases, stroke and kidney disease. Death rates from these diseases have decreased significantly, thanks in part to earlier and better treatment of HBP.

**How long will I be on medication?**

Perhaps the rest of your life. Managing blood pressure is a lifelong commitment; do your part starting today for yourself and for those you love. Listen to your doctor, read the sound medical information on this site, and act on the information to live a heart-healthier life.

---

**8. If you drink, limit alcohol**

Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. Your doctor may advise you to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink. If cutting back on alcohol is hard for you to do on your own, ask your healthcare provider about getting help.