Get a handle on hypertension

Hypertension is another name for high blood pressure. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 3 U.S. adults has high blood pressure, and only about half of these people have 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 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:³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blood pressure category</th>
<th>Systolic (top number)</th>
<th>Diastolic (bottom number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Less than 120</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevated</td>
<td>120–129</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 hypertension</td>
<td>130–139</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 hypertension</td>
<td>140 or higher</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Help lower your blood pressure

In many cases, blood pressure can be controlled. There are several lifestyle changes that may help. These include:²

• 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 stress

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.
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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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food group</th>
<th>Number of servings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,600 calories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grains</td>
<td>6 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>4 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>3–4 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat-free or low-fat dairy</td>
<td>2–3 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lean meat, poultry and fish</td>
<td>3–4 oz. or less per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts, seeds and legumes</td>
<td>3–4 per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fats and oils</td>
<td>2 servings per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweets and added sugars</td>
<td>3 or less per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- 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?

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
   www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/index.htm
2. National Institute on Aging
   www.nia.nih.gov/health/high-blood-pressure
3. American Heart Association
   www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/understanding-blood-pressure-readings
4. National Institute on Aging
   www.nia.nih.gov/health/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.