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How to Prevent High Blood Pressure

Also called: Lowering High Blood Pressure

Around half of American adults have high blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressure.html>] (hypertension). Many of those people don't know they have it because there are usually no warning signs. This can be dangerous, because high blood pressure can lead to life-threatening conditions like heart attack [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartattack.html>] or stroke [<https://medlineplus.gov/stroke.html>]. The good news is that you can often prevent or treat high blood pressure. Early diagnosis and heart-healthy lifestyle changes can keep high blood pressure from seriously damaging your health.

What is blood pressure?

Each time your heart beats, it pumps blood into your arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to the tissues and organs in your body). Blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. Blood pressure is measured as two numbers:

- **Systolic pressure** (the first and higher number) measures pressure inside your arteries when your heart beats
- **Diastolic pressure** (the second and lower number) measures the pressure inside your arteries when your heart rests between beats

As an example, a blood pressure reading of 120/80 means a systolic of 120 and a diastolic of 80.

How is high blood pressure diagnosed?

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. So the only way to find out if you have it is to get regular blood pressure checks [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/measuring-blood-pressure/>] from your health care provider. Your provider will use a gauge, a stethoscope or electronic sensor, and a blood pressure cuff. They will take two or more readings at separate appointments before making a diagnosis:

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic Blood Pressure		Diastolic Blood Pressure
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120 - 129	and	Less than 80
High Blood Pressure Stage 1	130 - 139	or	80 - 89
High Blood Pressure Stage 2	140 or higher	or	90 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis (dangerously high blood pressure - seek medical care right away)	Higher than 180	and	Higher than 120

For children and teens, the provider compares the blood pressure reading to what is normal for other kids who are the same age, height, and sex.

Who is more likely to develop high blood pressure?

Anyone can develop high blood pressure, but there are certain factors that can increase your risk:

- **Age.** Blood pressure tends to rise with age.
- **Race/Ethnicity.** High blood pressure is more common in Black adults. They also tend to have higher average blood pressure numbers and get high blood pressure earlier in life.
- **Sex.** Men are more likely than women to develop high blood pressure throughout middle age. But in older adults, women are more likely than men to develop high blood pressure.
- **Lifestyle.** Certain lifestyle habits can raise your risk for high blood pressure, such as eating too much sodium [<https://medlineplus.gov/sodium.html>] (salt) or not enough potassium [<https://medlineplus.gov/potassium.html>] , lack of exercise [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthrisksofaninactivelifestyle.html>] , drinking too much alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcohol.html>] , and smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>] .
- **Family history and genetics** [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/hypertension>] . High blood pressure often runs in families. Many genes are linked to small increases in high blood pressure risk.
- **Social and economic factors:**
 - Research shows that factors such as income, education level, where you live, and the type of job you have may raise your risk of high blood pressure. For example, working early or late shifts can raise your risk.
 - Experiencing discrimination and poverty has been linked to high blood pressure. Also, some research has shown that trauma in childhood may raise the risk of high blood pressure.
- **Certain medicines.** Some medicines can raise your blood pressure, including:
 - Certain antidepressants [<https://medlineplus.gov/antidepressants.html>]
 - Decongestants (medicines to relieve a stuffy nose)
 - Hormonal birth control pills [<https://medlineplus.gov/birthcontrol.html>]
 - Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which are a type of pain reliever [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>]
- **Having certain other medical conditions,** such as:
 - Some tumors
 - Chronic kidney disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronickidneydisease.html>]
 - Diabetes [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetes.html>]
 - Metabolic syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/metabolicsyndrome.html>]
 - Overweight and obesity [<https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>]
 - Sleep apnea [<https://medlineplus.gov/sleepapnea.html>]
 - Thyroid problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/thyroiddiseases.html>]

How can I prevent high blood pressure?

You can help prevent high blood pressure by having a healthy lifestyle. This means:

- **Eating a healthy diet.** To help manage your blood pressure, you should limit the amount of sodium [<https://medlineplus.gov/sodium.html>] (salt) that you eat and increase the amount of potassium [<https://medlineplus.gov/potassium.html>] in your diet. It is also important to eat foods that are lower in fat, as well as plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The DASH eating plan [<https://medlineplus.gov/dasheatingplan.html>] is an example of an eating plan that can help you to lower your blood pressure.
- **Getting regular physical activity** [<https://medlineplus.gov/howmuchexercisedoineed.html>] . Regular physical activity can help you maintain a healthy weight and lower your blood pressure.
- **Being at a healthy weight** [<https://medlineplus.gov/weightcontrol.html>] . Being overweight or having obesity increases your risk for high blood pressure. Maintaining a healthy weight can help you control high blood pressure and reduce your risk for other health problems.
- **Limiting alcohol.** Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. It also adds extra calories, which may cause weight gain.
- **Not smoking.** Cigarette smoking raises your blood pressure and puts you at higher risk for heart attack and stroke. If you do not smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, talk to your provider for help in finding the best way for you to quit [<https://medlineplus.gov/quittingsmoking.html>] .
- **Managing stress** [<https://medlineplus.gov/stress.html>] . Learning how to relax and manage stress can improve your emotional and physical health and lower high blood pressure. Stress management techniques include exercising, listening to music, focusing on something calm or peaceful, and meditating.
- **Getting enough high-quality sleep** [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthysleep.html>] .


If you already have high blood pressure, it is important to prevent it from getting worse or causing complications. You need to get regular medical care and follow your treatment plan. Your plan will include healthy lifestyle habit recommendations and possibly medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodpressuremedicines.html>] .

NIH: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute


Start Here

- Preventing High Blood Pressure [<https://www.cdc.gov/high-blood-pressure/prevention/>]
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Prevention and Risk Factors


- Community Health Worker Multicultural Resources [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/heart-truth/CHW/multicultural-resources>] (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - **PDF**
- Mind Your Risks [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/public-education/mind-your-risks>]
 (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)


Related Issues

- Alcohol: Does It Affect Blood Pressure? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/blood-pressure/FAQ-20058254?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/blood-pressure/faq-20058254?p=1>]
- Anxiety: A Cause of High Blood Pressure? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/anxiety/FAQ-20058549?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/anxiety/faq-20058549?p=1>]
- Blood Pressure: Is It Affected by Cold Weather? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/blood-pressure/FAQ-20058250?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/blood-pressure/faq-20058250?p=1>]
- Caffeine: How Does It Affect Blood Pressure? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/blood-pressure/FAQ-20058543?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/blood-pressure/faq-20058543?p=1>]
- Elevated Blood Pressure [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/prehypertension/symptoms-causes/syc-20376703?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/prehypertension/symptoms-causes/syc-20376703?p=1>]
- Get the Most Out of Home Blood Pressure Monitoring [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/ART-20047889?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/art-20047889?p=1>]
- Measuring Blood Pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/measuring-blood-pressure/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/medicion-de-la-presion-arterial/>]
- Sleep Deprivation: A Cause of High Blood Pressure? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/sleep-deprivation/faq-20057959?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/sleep-deprivation/faq-20057959?p=1>]


Specifics

- 10 Ways to Control High Blood Pressure without Medication [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/ART-20046974?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/art-20046974?p=1>]
- Can Whole-Grain Foods Lower Blood Pressure? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/whole-grain-foods/FAQ-20058417?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/whole-grain-foods/faq-20058417?p=1>]
- Common High Blood Pressure Myths [<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/the-facts-about-high-blood-pressure/common-high-blood-pressure-myths>] (American Heart Association)


DASH Diet: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/dasheatingplan.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/dasheatingplan.html>]

- **Exercise: A Drug-Free Approach to Lowering High Blood Pressure** [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/ART-20045206?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/art-20045206?p=1>]
- **How Potassium Can Help Control High Blood Pressure** [<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/changes-you-can-make-to-manage-high-blood-pressure/how-potassium-can-help-control-high-blood-pressure>] (American Heart Association)
- **Managing Stress to Control High Blood Pressure** [<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/changes-you-can-make-to-manage-high-blood-pressure/managing-stress-to-control-high-blood-pressure>] (American Heart Association)
- **Shaking the Salt Habit to Lower High Blood Pressure** [<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/changes-you-can-make-to-manage-high-blood-pressure/shaking-the-salt-habit-to-lower-high-blood-pressure>] (American Heart Association)
- **Tips to Reduce Salt and Sodium** [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/TipsToReduceSodium.pdf>]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - PDF

Genetics

- **Hypertension: MedlinePlus Genetics** [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/hypertension>]  (National Library of Medicine)


Videos and Tutorials

- **Blood pressure** [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000013.htm>]  (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/anatomyvideos/000013.htm>]

Test Your Knowledge

- **Blood Pressure and Lifestyle Quiz** [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/000101_29.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/000101_90.htm]
- **What Do You Know About Low Sodium Diets?** [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/007483_28.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/007483_89.htm]

Clinical Trials

- **ClinicalTrials.gov: Lifestyle Changes for High Blood Pressure** [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22high+blood+pressure%22&intr=lifestyle&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles


References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- **Article: The effect of follow-up on the blood pressure control: a longitudinal...** [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40722024>]
- **Article: Factors Influencing Hypertension Prevention Behaviors in Rural Areas: A Cross-Sectional Study...** [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40717721>]
- **Article: Hypertension Prevalence, Awareness, and Control in US Adults Before and After...** [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40685707>]
- **How to Prevent High Blood Pressure -- see more articles** [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Hypertension%2Fprevention++and++control%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- **American Heart Association** [<https://www.heart.org/en/>]

Patient Handouts

- Controlling your high blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000101.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000101.htm>]
- DASH diet to lower high blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000770.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000770.htm>]
- Healthy Blood Pressure for Healthy Hearts: Tracking Your Numbers
[https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/HBP_Worksheet_508.pdf]
 (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - **PDF**
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/presion-arterial-saludable-para-corazones-saludables-seguimiento-de-sus-numeros-healthy>]
- Low-salt diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000109.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000109.htm>]
- Stress and your heart [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000768.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000768.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000013.htm>]
- Controlling your high blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000101.htm>]
- DASH diet to lower high blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000770.htm>]
- High blood pressure and diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007483.htm>]
- Low-salt diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000109.htm>]
- Stress and your heart [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000768.htm>]

Related Health Topics

- Alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcohol.html>]
- Blood Pressure Medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodpressuremedicines.html>]
- DASH Eating Plan [<https://medlineplus.gov/dasheatingplan.html>]
- High Blood Pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressure.html>]
- High Blood Pressure in Pregnancy [<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressureinpregnancy.html>]
- Nutrition [<https://medlineplus.gov/nutrition.html>]
- Quitting Smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/quittingsmoking.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *How to Prevent High Blood Pressure* is the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>]

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