

Simple Steps to Control Blood Pressure

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is common in this country: about 30 percent of Americans in general, and 28 – 30 percent of Illinoisans have high blood pressure. And unfortunately, only one in four people with hypertension have it under control. The good news is that most people can improve blood pressure through lifestyle changes. In fact, blood pressure management is usually 70 percent lifestyle and 30 percent medication.

Know your numbers: There's a reason high blood pressure is called the silent killer. Until you have advanced heart or vascular disease you have no symptoms. Normal blood pressure is less than 120 mmHg systolic (the top number) and less than 80 mmHg diastolic (the lower number). For more information about current guidelines, go [here](#).

Maintain healthy weight or drop some pounds if you are overweight. Even small amounts of weight loss can improve blood pressure. In general, you can reduce blood pressure by 1 mmHg for each 2.2 pounds you lose.

Be physically active. Consistent physical activity lowers blood pressure. Strive for at least 150 minutes per week of moderate or vigorous activity. This can lower blood pressure by 5 – 8 mmHg.

Reduce sodium. Again, even small reductions in sodium positively influences blood pressure – in general by about 5 – 6 mmHg. The American Heart Association recommends keeping sodium intake below 1500 milligrams per day. One way to do this is to prepare more meals at home. Seventy-five percent of the sodium we ingest comes from packaged and restaurant food.

Eat healthfully. Follow an eating plan with lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products while limiting saturated and trans fats. This style of eating is known as DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension). Eating this way regularly can lower blood pressure by as much as 11 mm Hg. Another change that can help is to eat potassium rich foods. Examples are bananas, cooked broccoli and kidney beans. This can decrease blood pressure by 4 – 5 mmHg.

Quit smoking and vaping. Nicotine raises blood pressure significantly. You can see a decrease in blood pressure almost immediately after quitting.

Moderate caffeine. For some, but not all, caffeine can raise blood pressure. To see if caffeine affects your blood pressure check your blood pressure before having a caffeinated beverage and again within 30 minutes afterwards.

Limit alcohol. Reducing alcohol consumption to moderate levels (two drinks per day for men under 65 years, one per day for women and for men over 65) can possibly lower blood pressure by about 4 mmHg. Be aware that drinking more than moderate amounts of alcohol lessens the benefits of blood pressure medications.

Get enough sleep. Emerging research is beginning to help us understand the negative effects lack of sleep has on blood pressure. Strive for 6 – 8 hours per night.

Learn more at these sites:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/art-20046974>

<https://www.webmd.com/hypertension-high-blood-pressure/how-to-lower-blood-pressure#2>

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/6-natural-ways-to-lower-blood-pressure/>

<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/changes-you-can-make-to-manage-high-blood-pressure>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/8-pill-free-ways-to-lower-your-blood-pressure>