



Home / Services and Resources / HealthLinkBC Files
/ Lifestyle Steps to Lower Your High Blood Pressure

Lifestyle Steps to Lower Your High Blood Pressure

HealthLinkBC File Number: 68b

Nutrition Series

Last Updated: October 2018

Download PDF:

English

Chinese

Farsi

French

Korean

Punjabi

Spanish

Vietnamese

High blood pressure is when the blood circulating in your body puts too much pressure on the walls of your arteries. This causes damage to those arteries and over time increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. Another term for high blood pressure is hypertension.

Making healthy lifestyle choices can help lower your blood pressure and improve your health. Below is a list of some of the most important changes you can make in your day-to-day life to help lower your blood pressure.

Lose extra body weight

If you take medication for high blood pressure, tell your health care provider if you've lost weight. They may need to adjust the amount of blood pressure medicine you take.

To help you reach and maintain a healthy body weight:

- Keep a food diary. Monitoring what you eat, how much, when, and why can help you see where you can start making changes. It can also help you track your progress towards breaking old habits and adding new healthy habits
- Fill half your plate with vegetables and fruit at lunch and dinner. Vegetables and fruit are naturally low in calories, high in vitamins and minerals, and help to satisfy your hunger

Be physically active every day

Regular physical activity can help lower high blood pressure. It can also help you lower cholesterol levels, reach or maintain a healthy body weight, and manage stress.

Try different activities and choose the ones that you enjoy. Brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, and team sports, such as hockey, soccer, and basketball are just some of the activities you can choose from. Start slowly and build up to at least 150 minutes of aerobic activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more. This could be achieved through 30 minutes on 5 or more days each week.

Check with a qualified exercise professional or your health care provider before you start a physical activity program.

Eat a plant-based diet rich in vegetables and fruit

Following a diet that is rich in vegetables and fruit, whole grains, protein from plant sources, and low-fat milk products, and is limited in sweets, sugary drinks, and red meat is an effective way to lower high blood pressure. This pattern of eating is

called the DASH diet. DASH stands for *Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension*. A DASH diet is low in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol, and rich in calcium, potassium, magnesium, and fibre.

For more information on the DASH diet, including detailed eating plans, see Your Guide to Lowering Blood Pressure with

DASH: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/hbp_low.pdf

Limit sodium intake

Everyone needs some sodium, but too much can raise blood pressure and increase the risk of heart disease. Most healthy adults need only 1500mg of sodium each day. Limiting sodium to 1500mg per day and following a DASH pattern of eating, will lower your blood pressure more than following the DASH diet alone. To lower sodium in your diet:

- Eat fewer packaged, ready-to-eat and take-out foods
- At home, prepare your own meals often, using little or no salt
- Flavour your foods with herbs and salt-free spices, vinegar, lemon, lime, garlic, ginger and onion
- Use fresh or frozen vegetables and fruit whenever possible. Vegetables and fruit are naturally low in sodium
- Drain and rinse canned vegetables and canned beans, peas and lentils under cold, running water
- Taste your food before adding salt
- Use the % Daily Value (%DV) on the food label to see if a food has a little or a lot of sodium. Look for products with a sodium content of less than 15% DV
- When eating out, check the nutrition information of menu items and choose foods with less sodium. You can also ask for your food to be prepared without salt or monosodium glutamate (MSG) and to have salty sauces, dressings, and condiments served on the side

Limit alcohol use

Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. It also can harm the liver, brain, and heart. If you have high blood pressure and drink alcohol, limit your alcohol to the following amounts:

- For men: fewer than 15 drinks per week, with no more than 2 drinks a day on most days
- For women: fewer than 10 drinks per week, with no more than 2 drinks a day on most days

1 drink is equal to

Alcohol Type	Amount
Liquor – 40% alcohol content (e.g. rum, rye, vodka, gin)	43 mL (1.5 oz)
Wine – 12% alcohol content	148 mL (5 oz)
Beer, cider, or cooler – 5% alcohol content	355 mL (12 oz)

Avoid tobacco products and secondhand smoke

Any amount and any form of tobacco can damage your heart and blood vessels. This increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. Tobacco products and secondhand smoke can also stop your blood pressure medicine from working well.

If you smoke, try to quit. Ask your family, friends, or health care provider for help. For more information about quitting smoking, visit www.quitnow.ca or call 1-877-455-2233.

Manage stress

All types of stress can raise your blood pressure. If you think you need help managing your stress, talk to your health care provider, or visit the Heart and Stroke Foundation - Get Healthy/Reduce stress: www.heartandstroke.ca/get-healthy/reduce-stress

For More Information

For more information about hypertension and blood pressure, visit the following resources;

- Hypertension Canada hypertension.ca

- Heart & Stroke – My Blood Pressure Action Plan:
<https://www.heartandstroke.ca/get-healthy/health-etools/etools-maintenance?ArticleCategoryID=4&ArticleID=1048>

For more nutrition information, visit Healthy Eating at www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating or call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered dietitian.

For physical activity information, visit www.healthlinkbc.ca/physical-activity or call **8-1-1** to speak to a qualified exercise professional.

Is it an emergency?

If you or someone in your care has chest pains, difficulty breathing, or severe bleeding, it could be a **life-threatening emergency**. Call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number immediately.

If you are concerned about a possible poisoning or exposure to a toxic substance, call **Poison Control** now at **1-800-567-8911**.