

# Take Time to Check Your Blood Pressure

Did you know that hypertension is the most common diagnosis in the United States, affecting approximately 50 million people? Consequently, it is imperative that we take time to screen and treat high blood pressure as a part of a preventative health plan.

Pre-hypertension is defined as blood pressure between 120/80 and 139/89. Stage I hypertension is defined as 140/90 to 159/99. As blood pressure creeps up and moves into the higher ranges, it can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney failure and blindness. High blood pressure is the most consistent and powerful predictor of stroke. Often referred to as the silent killer, hypertension typically has no symptoms.

Now is the time to implement an effective strategy to increase awareness of high blood pressure and prevent and/or assess present damage to target organs. The good news is that creating a healthy lifestyle can prevent and lessen hypertension and its consequences. Creating a healthy lifestyle is the foundation for all treatment and prevention of hypertension.

### What lifestyle changes are necessary to lower blood pressure?

- Decrease salt to about 1-1/4 teaspoon per day. Take the time to read labels and find low-sodium foods.
- Change what you eat. The recommended diet for reducing blood pressure is the DASH diet. This diet emphasizes whole grains, fruits, vegetables, fish and non-fat dairy. When eating whole grains negatively affects your weight, then focus on fish, lean meats, non-fat dairy, and lots of fruits and vegetables. Choose the most colorful ones like berries, leafy greens and citrus.
- Reduce your intake of alcohol. A recommended guideline limits consumption to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Long-term reductions in blood pressure have been achieved with modest weight loss among individuals aged 30-54 who were overweight and had moderately high blood pressure.

- Exercise. A recommended goal is 20-30 minutes of exercise a day. Start slowly and work up gradually.
- Decrease stress. Biofeedback, deep breathing, yoga, meditation, bodywork, and hypnotherapy all provide benefit in activating a relaxing response.

### How can lifestyle changes be incorporated into our busy, stressful lives?

- Steps to creating change:
- Create the intention to make a change. Identify what is important in your life.



*All's Well*  
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by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND

- Set realistic goals for weight loss, healthy eating, exercise, and stress reduction in the here-and-now. Small changes have significant blood pressure-reducing effects.
- Identify beliefs that stand in the way of achieving goals set. Replace those beliefs with the energy of new thoughts, feelings, and sensations.
- Create a plan to achieve each goal. Make a commitment to the plan, which means engaging in an activity each day toward the fulfillment of that goal.
- Visualize the completion of each goal and experience the effect on a sensory and emotional level. Typically what is willed with strong emotion is created.
- Tell a friend, coach, therapist, or doctor your plan. This provides the glue or accountability that connects all the pieces together.
- The fulfillment of each aspect of your plan develops strength and an opportunity to see the effect of your choices. It takes only 21 days to create a new habit.

### When lifestyle changes need a boost

Certain supplements and/or pharmacologic treatments can bring blood pressure under

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