

Keep your blood pressure in check... and check your blood pressure regularly!

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You probably know that having high blood pressure is bad for your health. But do you know whether your own blood pressure is high? And do you know being physically active can make a big difference – either to keep your blood pressure in a healthy range or to lower it if it's already too high?

What is blood pressure?

The heart pumps blood through a network of blood vessels to deliver oxygen and nutrients to all parts of the body. The pressure in the blood vessels is highest when the heart contracts (systolic pressure), and is lower when the heart relaxes to fill up again (diastolic pressure). This high and low is what is measured when you get your blood pressure checked – the top number is systolic pressure and the bottom number is diastolic. "Normal" or desired blood pressure levels depend on factors like age and medical conditions but generally 120/80 mmHg or less is considered normal for a healthy adult. Treatment is often recommended for blood pressure over 140/90 mmHg. You should know your blood pressure numbers, and what your doctor thinks is a healthy blood pressure for you.

***Know your numbers - Have your blood pressure checked regularly.
Talk to your doctor about what a healthy blood pressure is for you!***

Blood pressure is controlled by lots of interrelated checks and balances in the body, such as:

- hormones produced by the kidneys and other organs that carry "messages" via the blood,
- "messages" from the nervous system,
- the level of muscle contraction in the smaller blood vessels,
- the degree of stretch or rigidity of the vessel walls,
- the amount of fluid the body is retaining,
- how forcefully the heart is pumping.

When any one of these factors is out of balance, blood pressure can become too high, which is called hypertension.

Hypertension makes your heart work harder to pump your blood, and may damage blood vessels. This can increase your risk for other health concerns, such as heart, kidney or eye diseases, strokes or problems with sexual health.

Some things that affect your blood pressure can't be changed, (ie. age and genetics) however, many risk factors can be modified. Here are a few things that can help.

- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight and composition (avoid excess abdominal weight).
- Manage diabetes appropriately.
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet (low in salt and fat).
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Lower stress by using positive coping strategies.
- Avoid smoking or using any tobacco products.
- **Stay physically active!**

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Physical Activity - do it for life!

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Good news – hypertension can be managed.

Your doctor may prescribe medications as one part of the plan to lower your blood pressure. Physical activity will also help and may eliminate or reduce the amount of medication you need. Ask your doctor how increasing your activity may help your blood pressure.

Physical activity *directly* improves blood pressure by:

- decreasing resistance of blood vessels,
- decreasing activity of the sympathetic nervous system responsible for constricting blood vessels,
- increasing chemicals such as nitric oxide, which increases the diameter of blood vessels,

...therefore improving blood flow!

Physical activity *indirectly* improves blood pressure by:

- decreasing stress,
- increasing fitness,
- helping to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.



Next steps...

- if you have normal blood pressure – stay active to help keep your blood pressure in a healthy range for life.
 - if your blood pressure is slightly high – start walking, building up to 30-60 minutes of brisk walking each day.
 - if you have a medical condition, trouble walking, or if your blood pressure is quite high, ask your doctor about what level of activity is a safe starting point for you.
- Before adding vigorous activity, consider checking with your doctor and consulting an exercise professional if you are middle aged or older.*

Take steps today to know your blood pressure. And then, take steps (as many steps as you can, every day!) to keep "moving" towards the healthiest blood pressure for you!

