

10 ways to control high blood pressure without medication

Here are 10 lifestyle changes you can make to lower your blood pressure and keep it down.

1. Lose extra pounds and watch your waistline

Blood pressure often increases as weight increases. Besides shedding pounds, you generally should also keep an eye on your waistline. Carrying too much weight around your waist can put you at greater risk of high blood pressure. In general: Men are at risk if their waist measurement is greater than 40 inches (102 centimetres). Women are at risk if their waist measurement is greater than 35 inches (89 centimetres).

2. Exercise regularly

Regular physical activity — at least 30 minutes most days of the week — can lower your blood pressure by 4 to 9 millimetres of mercury (mm Hg).

3. Eat a healthy diet

Eating a diet that is rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products and skimps on saturated fat and cholesterol can lower your blood pressure by up to 14 mm Hg. This eating plan is known as the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet.

4. Reduce sodium in your diet

Even a small reduction in the sodium in your diet can reduce blood pressure by 2 to 8 mm Hg.

The effect of sodium intake on blood pressure varies among groups of people. In general, limit sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day or less. However, a lower sodium intake — 1,500 mg a day or less — is appropriate for people with greater salt sensitivity, anyone of age 51

or older, anyone diagnosed with high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease. To decrease sodium in your diet, consider these tips:

- Read food labels. If possible, choose low-sodium alternatives of the foods and beverages you normally buy.
- Eat fewer processed foods. Only a small amount of sodium occurs naturally in foods. Most sodium is added during processing.
- Don't add salt. Just 1 level teaspoon of salt has 2,300 mg of sodium. Use herbs or spices to add flavour to your food.

5. Limit the amount of alcohol you drink

Alcohol can be both good and bad for your health. In small amounts, it can potentially lower your blood pressure by 2 to 4 mm Hg.

6. Quit smoking

Each cigarette you smoke increases your blood pressure for many minutes after you finish.

7. Cut back on caffeine

The role caffeine plays in blood pressure is still debated. Caffeine can raise blood pressure by as much as 10 mm Hg in people who rarely consume it, but there is little to no strong effect on blood pressure in habitual coffee drinkers.

8. Reduce your stress

Chronic stress is an important contributor to high blood pressure. Occasional stress also can contribute to high blood pressure if you react to stress by eating unhealthy food, drinking alcohol or smoking.

- Take some time to think about what causes you to feel stressed, such as work, family, finances or illness. Once you know what's causing your stress, consider how you can eliminate or reduce stress.
- Know your stress triggers. Avoid whatever triggers you can. For example, spend less time with people who bother you or avoid driving in rush-hour traffic.
- Make time to relax and to do activities you enjoy. Take 15 to 20 minutes a day to sit quietly and breathe deeply. Try to intentionally enjoy what you do rather than hurrying through your "relaxing activities" at a stressful pace.
- Practice gratitude. Expressing gratitude to others can help reduce stressful thoughts.

9. Monitor your blood pressure at home and see your doctor regularly

Home monitoring can help you keep tabs on your blood pressure, make certain your lifestyle changes are working, and alert you and your doctor to potential health complications. Blood pressure monitors are available widely and without a prescription. Regular visits with your doctor are also key to controlling your blood pressure.

10. Get support

Supportive family and friends can help improve your health. They may encourage you to take care of yourself, drive you to the doctor's office or embark on an exercise program with you to keep your blood pressure low. If you find you need support beyond your family and friends, consider joining a support group. This may put you in touch with people who can give you an emotional or morale boost and who can offer practical tips to cope with your condition.

(Reference: Mayo Clinic)