

# Health care tips

## High Blood Pressure

### What is high blood pressure?<sup>1</sup>

Blood pressure is the force of blood against your blood vessels. High blood pressure can increase your risk of heart attacks, strokes, blindness and kidney disease. High blood pressure is also known as “the silent killer” because there are usually no symptoms. You may not know that your blood pressure is high until you get it checked.

### An important first step: Talk to your doctor<sup>2</sup>

Ask your doctor about how to control your blood pressure. Be prepared to share any family history of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, stroke or diabetes. Have a list of your medications ready and ask if any of them may raise your blood pressure. Tell your doctor if you have had any recent chest pain or shortness of breath.

### Medications can help lower your blood pressure<sup>3</sup>

Proper diet and exercise decrease your blood pressure; however, for some it may not be enough. Several types of medications can help lower your blood pressure. The medications differ in the way they work, their side effects and how you should take them. To reach your blood pressure goal, you may need to take one or more of these medications. Talk to your doctor to see which diets, exercises, and medications may be right for you.

### How to check your blood pressure<sup>4</sup>

If you check your blood pressure at home, here are some tips to help you get accurate results:

- Avoid caffeine, tobacco or exercise 30 minutes before measuring.
- Rest and sit in a chair with your back supported and feet uncrossed, planted on the floor for 5 minutes before measuring.
- Place your arm flat (on a table) with the upper arm at heart level.
- Take two or three readings a minute apart.
- Seek emergency care if you get more than one reading above 180/110 mmHg.
- Record the date, time and results of each readings.

### Questions to ask your doctor<sup>5</sup>

- Are there lifestyle changes, such as diet and exercise, that I can make to help manage my high blood pressure?
- Should I take medication for my blood pressure?
- What's my goal weight?
- What's my blood pressure goal?

- How and when should I check my blood pressure?
- Are there certain foods I should eat or avoid?
- If I need to take blood pressure medication, what should I know?

## Ways to keep your blood pressure in check<sup>6-8</sup>

- Check your blood pressure regularly using a home blood pressure machine.
- Choose foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products.
- Cut down on foods that are high in saturated fat and cholesterol.
- Limit your daily salt use to no more than 2,300 mg (1 teaspoon) daily.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Stop smoking.

**National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute** | [nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/high-blood-pressure](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/high-blood-pressure)

**American College of Cardiology** | [cardiosmart.org/Heart-Conditions/High-Blood-Pressure](https://cardiosmart.org/Heart-Conditions/High-Blood-Pressure)

**American Heart Association**

[heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/the-facts-about-high-blood-pressure](https://heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/the-facts-about-high-blood-pressure)

<sup>1</sup> American Heart Association. *The Fact About High Blood Pressure*. [heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/the-facts-about-high-blood-pressure](https://heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/the-facts-about-high-blood-pressure) Accessed January 29, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Mayo Clinic. *High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)*. [mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20373417](https://mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20373417) Accessed January 29, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> JAMA 2014 Evidence-Based Guideline for the Management of High Blood Pressure in Adults: Report From the Panel Members Appointed to the Eighth Joint National Committee (JNC 8). [jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/1791497](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/1791497). Accessed March 20, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> American Heart Association. *Monitoring Your Blood Pressure at Home*. [heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/KnowYourNumbers/Monitoring-Your-Blood-Pressure-at-Home\\_UCM\\_301874\\_Article.jsp#.WNAWNk3run4](https://heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/KnowYourNumbers/Monitoring-Your-Blood-Pressure-at-Home_UCM_301874_Article.jsp#.WNAWNk3run4). Updated October 2016. Accessed March 20, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> American Heart Association. *Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Blood Pressure*. [heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/HighBloodPressureToolsResources/Questions-to-Ask-Your-Doctor-About-Blood-Pressure\\_UCM\\_304907\\_Article.jsp#.Vk\\_EPd\\_JDGg](https://heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/HighBloodPressureToolsResources/Questions-to-Ask-Your-Doctor-About-Blood-Pressure_UCM_304907_Article.jsp#.Vk_EPd_JDGg). Updated October 2016. Accessed March 20, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> American Heart Association. *Managing Blood Pressure with a Heart-Healthy Diet*. [heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/MakeChangesThatMatter/Managing-Blood-Pressure-with-a-Heart-Healthy-Diet\\_UCM\\_301879\\_Article.jsp#.WNAbDk3run4](https://heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/MakeChangesThatMatter/Managing-Blood-Pressure-with-a-Heart-Healthy-Diet_UCM_301879_Article.jsp#.WNAbDk3run4). Updated October 2016. Accessed March 20, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Most Americans Should Consume Less Sodium*. [cdc.gov/salt/](https://cdc.gov/salt/). Accessed March 20, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> American Heart Association. *Changes You Can Make to Manage High Blood Pressure*. [heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/MakeChangesThatMatter/Changes-You-Can-Make-to-Manage-High-Blood-Pressure\\_UCM\\_002054\\_Article.jsp](https://heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/MakeChangesThatMatter/Changes-You-Can-Make-to-Manage-High-Blood-Pressure_UCM_002054_Article.jsp). Updated October 2016. Accessed March 20, 2017.

The information in this educational tool does not substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis or treatment of your physician. Always seek the help of your physician or qualified health provider for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition.