

# High Blood Pressure: Weight Control

## What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against artery walls as the heart pumps blood through the body. High blood pressure (hypertension) is blood pressure that keeps being higher than normal.

## How is high blood pressure affected by weight?

One of the most important causes of high blood pressure is overweight. An unhealthy weight puts stress on the heart and lungs, forcing them to work harder. Losing weight reduces the stress on your heart. It can also lower your blood pressure.

## What can I do to control my weight?

Change your eating habits so that you lose 1 to 2 pounds a week until you reach a healthy weight. Even a modest weight loss of 5 to 10 pounds can help. Your diet needs to be low in fat, cholesterol, and salt. Be careful about serving sizes. Don't drink a lot of juice or soda. Also limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

A regular, moderate exercise program can help you lose weight or keep a normal weight because it increases your metabolism and burns up calories. It reduces stress and promotes good health. Exercise also lowers your cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

Ask your healthcare provider to recommend a diet and exercise program that is right for you.

## How long will the effects last?

If you are overweight and have high blood pressure, you will need to control your blood pressure all of your life. This will require lifelong blood pressure monitoring and treatment.

Community agencies and commercial programs are available to help you lose weight. Other support services and treatments that have helped many people include:

- motivation and behavior modification courses
- group therapy
- nutrition counseling.

### **How can I take care of myself?**

- Follow the treatment plan prescribed by your healthcare provider.
- Do not smoke.
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals that reduce the calories in your diet enough for you to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week and reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Reduce the salt, fat, cholesterol, and caffeine in your diet. Consider following the DASH diet. This diet is low in fat, cholesterol, red meat, and sweets. It emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods. The DASH diet also includes whole-grain products, fish, poultry, and nuts.
- Exercise regularly, according to your healthcare provider's instructions.
- Learn to use deep breathing and relaxation techniques to reduce stress.
- See your provider regularly to have your blood pressure checked. Consider buying a home blood-pressure monitor.

### **How can I help prevent high blood pressure?**

To help prevent high blood pressure:

- Keep a healthy weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Moderate drinking means up to 1 drink a day for women and up to 2 drinks for men. A drink equals 12 ounces of regular beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 and 1/2 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits such as whiskey or vodka.

Developed by RelayHealth

Published by RelayHealth.

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