

Lifestyle Changes to Lower Your Blood Pressure

Lifestyle changes such as eating better and moving more can reduce your blood pressure, which can lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. When making changes, start slowly and take it one step at a time. You may have to try more than once—but don't give up. Get support when you need it.

1. Eat in a Heart-Healthy Way

A healthy eating plan can protect you from developing high blood pressure and lower your blood pressure if it's too high. Talk to your healthcare team about the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) plan or other eating plans that would be best for you.

Eat More:

Fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains

Beans, lentils, tofu, fish and chicken

Home-cooked meals

Eat Less:

Processed foods such as snack foods, pastries and lunch meats

High-fat meats such as sausage, bacon and beef

Fast foods and premade meals

2. Eat Less Sodium

Too much sodium (salt) can increase your blood pressure. Most of the sodium we eat comes from restaurant meals or processed food. Any decrease in sodium can be helpful, but if you have high blood pressure, try to eat less than 1,500 mg of sodium a day.

- Eat fewer restaurant meals and processed foods.
- Buy low-sodium foods such as soups, vegetables and beans.
- When cooking, use herbs, spices, lemon or vinegar instead of salt.

3. Move Your Body More

Moving your body can help lower your blood pressure. Check with your healthcare team before starting a new exercise routine. If you can, get support from an exercise professional. Work toward a goal of being active at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week.

- The first step is to sit less. Take regular activity breaks about every 30 minutes when sitting. Get up and move when watching TV, working or reading.
- Then increase your daily activities. Try gardening, housework, taking the stairs, walking to the store, or parking farther away from where you are going.
- Next, step it up with a regular physical activity routine. Try walking, going to a gym or joining exercise classes. Do a mix of aerobic and resistance exercise.



Sutter Resources

- Talk to your healthcare team about support and resources for lifestyle changes.
- Go to sutterhealth.org to learn more about high blood pressure. Find local resources by going to sutterhealth.org/classes-events and selecting topics such as: Fitness, Heart Health, Mental Health, Nutrition, Sleep or Weight Management.

What Are Processed Foods?

Processed foods are generally any packaged food with a nutrition label. Many are high in unhealthy fats, salt (sodium) and sugar. These include snack foods, frozen meals and processed meats. Choose options lower in saturated fat, sodium and added sugars. Avoid foods with partially hydrogenated oils.

4. Manage Your Weight

If you are overweight, even a small weight loss can improve your blood pressure. Include your family and friends as support. Be easy on yourself and keep trying!

- To get started, ask your healthcare team for resources, join a weight-loss program, or meet with a registered dietitian or coach.
- Follow tips for eating heart-healthy foods. Make sure you are eating the right portions of food to manage your weight—not more than you need.
- If you're at risk for diabetes, you may be eligible for the National Diabetes Prevention Program, which can lower blood pressure as well as prevent diabetes. Ask your healthcare team or insurance carrier about programs near you.

5. Limit Alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. Don't have more than two standard alcoholic drinks a day for men up to age 65, or one standard alcoholic drink for women and anyone over age 65.

A standard drink is:

- 12 ounces of regular beer
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces of hard alcohol (such as vodka or rum)

Quick Tip

Some people can reduce or stop their blood pressure medication after they've made lifestyle changes. However, it's important to continue taking your medication as recommended until you have discussed it with your doctor or healthcare team.

6. Manage Stress

Some stress is a realistic part of life, so it's important to learn ways to manage it. Taking steps to manage stress is good for your overall health.

- Try deep breathing exercises, yoga, mindfulness-based stress reduction, tai chi, meditation, or expressing gratitude and joy.
- Get support. If you feel like your stress level is high, try talking to a counselor, therapist, clergy member or someone from your healthcare team.

7. Get Restful Sleep

Poor sleep quality is linked to an increased risk of high blood pressure. Improving your sleep can improve your mood, stress and health.

- Aim for seven to nine hours per night.
- Try going to sleep and waking up at the same time every day. Keep your bedroom dark, cool and quiet. Avoid looking at phones or screens that give off light at least one hour before bed.
- If you are not sleeping well and this doesn't improve, talk to your healthcare team.

8. Stop Using Tobacco

Quitting tobacco can lower your blood pressure and prevent heart disease. Call 800-No-Butts or visit nobutts.org. For help, try the California Smokers' Helpline.

Additional Resources

- heart.org
The American Heart Association offers credible information on high blood pressure and tips for heart health.
- health.gov/moveyourway
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers expert advice and tips for physical activity.