



## UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES

### TANG CENTER

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Appointments:  
(510) 642-2000

### Want To Know More?

A complete copy of this information  
is available at:

[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/  
public/heart/hbp/prevhbp/index.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/prevhbp/index.htm)

For more information on either high  
blood pressure or weight and  
physical activity, contact:

The National Heart, Lung and Blood  
Institute Information Center  
P.O. Box 30105  
Bethesda, MD 20824-0105  
(301) 592-8573

## What Is High Blood Pressure?

Each time the heart beats (about 60-70 times a minute at rest), it pumps blood into the arteries. Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. Your blood pressure is at its greatest when the heart contracts and is pumping the blood. This is called systolic pressure. When the heart is at rest, in between beats, your blood pressure falls. This is the diastolic pressure. Blood pressure is considered normal when below 140/90. However, a blood pressure below 120/80 is even better for your heart and blood vessels.

High Blood Pressure, also called hypertension, is a risk factor for heart and kidney diseases and stroke. Heart disease is the number one killer in the United States, and stroke is the third most common cause of death. About one in every four American adults has high blood pressure. High blood pressure is especially dangerous because it often gives no warning signs or symptoms.

## Who's Likely To Develop High Blood Pressure?

Anyone can develop high blood pressure, but some are more likely than others. For example, high blood pressure is more common - it develops earlier and is more severe - in African-Americans than in whites. Other risk factors include cigarette smoking and overweight. Finally, heredity can make some families more likely than others to get high blood pressure.

## How Can You Prevent High Blood Pressure?

Everyone - regardless of race, age, sex or heredity - can help lower the chance of developing high blood pressure. Here's how:

- 1) Maintain a healthy weight; lose weight if you are overweight. As your body weight increases, your blood pressure rises. In fact, being overweight can make you two to six times more likely to develop high blood pressure. To lose weight, you need to eat fewer calories than you burn. But don't go on a crash diet! Losing weight and keeping it off involves a new way of eating and increasing physical activity for life. Here's how to eat and get on your way to a lower weight:

Choose foods low in calories and fat. Fat is a concentrated source of calories, so eating fewer fatty foods will reduce calories. Limit serving sizes, especially of high calorie foods like high-fat meats and cheeses. And try not to go back for seconds.

(continued)

## Try These Low Fat Foods

- Baked, broiled or poached chicken or turkey (skinless)
- Fish
- Lean cuts of meat (like round or sirloin)
- Skim, 1% or evaporated skim milk
- Lower-fat, low-sodium cheeses
- Fresh, frozen or canned fruit
- Fresh, frozen or canned (no salt added) vegetables (without cream or cheese sauces)
- Plain rice or pasta
- English muffins, bagels, sandwich breads and rolls
- Soft tortillas
- Cold cereals (lower in sodium)
- Cooked hot cereals (not instant since they are higher in sodium)

## Be More Physically Active

Use the stairs instead of the elevator.

Get off the bus one or two stops early and walk the rest of the way.

Park farther away from school, the store or work.

Ride a bike.

Go dancing.

Start a walking program.

2) **Be More Physically Active.** You don't have to be a marathon runner to benefit from physical activity. Even light activities, if done daily, can help lower your risk of heart disease.

3) **Choose Foods Lower in Salt and Sodium.** (See chart for sodium in foods.) Check food labels for the amount of sodium in foods. Choose those lower in sodium. Look for products that say "sodium free," "low sodium," or "unsalted," especially on cans, boxes, bottles, and bags. Choose convenience foods lower in sodium. Cut back on frozen dinners, pizza, packaged mixes, canned soups, and salad dressings with a lot of sodium.

Buy vegetables fresh, plain frozen, or canned with no salt added. Use fresh poultry, fish and lean meat, rather than canned or processed types. Rinse canned foods like tuna to remove some sodium.

Use herbs, spices, and salt-free seasonings in cooking and at the table. Cook rice, pasta, and hot cereals without salt. Cut back on instant or flavored rice, pasta, and cereal mixes because they usually have added salt.

4) **If You Drink Alcoholic Beverages, Do So In Moderation.** Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. It may also lead to the development of high blood pressure. So, limit how much you drink to no more than 2 drinks a day. The "Dietary Guidelines for Americans" recommend that for overall health women should limit their alcohol to no more than 1 drink a day.

5) **Make sure you are getting an adequate amount of potassium, calcium, and magnesium in your diet.**

**Potassium.** Eating foods rich in potassium will help protect some people from developing high blood pressure. Many fruits, vegetables, dairy foods, and fish are good sources of potassium.

**Calcium.** It is important to be sure to get at least the recommended amount of calcium – 800 milligrams per day for adults (pregnant and breastfeeding women need more) – from the foods you eat. Dairy foods like low fat selections of milk, yogurt, and cheese are good sources of calcium.

**Magnesium.** A diet low in magnesium may make your blood pressure rise. Magnesium is found in whole grains, green leafy vegetables, nuts, seeds, and dry peas and beans.

6) **Manage your stress.** Stress can make blood pressure go up for a while, and over time may contribute to the cause of high blood pressure. Stress management techniques are helpful if they help you feel better or stick to a weight-loss and/or exercise program.