

# Nutrition and Lifestyle Choices to Manage Blood Pressure

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**Blood pressure** is the force of blood pushing against the walls of blood vessels.

**High blood pressure** (hypertension) means there is too much pressure in your blood vessels. This can damage your vessels, which increases your risk for a heart attack or stroke. Ask your healthcare provider what your blood pressure should be.

My target blood pressure: \_\_\_\_\_

## What can I do to lower my blood pressure?

The nutrition and lifestyle choices below can help you lower your blood pressure. If you're ready to make changes, check off one or more things you'd like to do.

### Nutrition choices:

- Choose and prepare foods with little or no added salt.
- Eat more vegetables and fruit.
- Choose whole grains.
- Eat more beans, peas, and lentils.
- Use heart healthy fats every day.
- Enjoy fish at least 2 times a week.
- Eat foods with calcium.
- Limit the alcohol you drink.
- Limit caffeine.

### Lifestyle choices:

- Manage your weight.
- Be active every day.
- Manage stress.
- Quit smoking.

This handout has some information about each of these choices.



## Nutrition tips

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### Choose and prepare foods with little or no added salt (sodium)

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- Choose fresh, unprocessed, and homemade foods with little or no added salt.
- Limit salty foods, and processed and packaged foods such as restaurant foods, pickles, crackers, snack foods, deli meats, canned and dry soup, sauces, and condiments.
- Read labels and compare packages to find foods lower in sodium. Look for foods that have a % Daily Value (DV) of 5% or less for sodium.
- Avoid shaking salt on your food, and use little or no salt in cooking. If you do add salt, taste your food before adding it.
- All types of salts (sodium) increase your blood pressure: table salt, sea salt, Himalayan salt, kosher salt.
- Flavour food with spices, herbs, garlic, lemon juice, and vinegar instead of salt.

### Eat vegetables and fruit often

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Vegetables and fruit have potassium and fibre, which may help lower your blood pressure.

Some vegetables to enjoy:

|             |            |                |
|-------------|------------|----------------|
| bok choy    | green peas | spinach        |
| broccoli    | kale       | squash         |
| carrots     | peppers    | sweet potatoes |
| green beans | potatoes   | tomatoes       |

Some fruits to enjoy:

|          |         |              |
|----------|---------|--------------|
| apples   | grapes  | peaches      |
| apricots | mangoes | pineapples   |
| bananas  | melons  | raisins      |
| berries  | oranges | strawberries |
| dates    | papaya  | tangerines   |

The tips below can help you eat more vegetables and fruit every day.

- At meals, fill half your plate with vegetables or fruit.
- Have fruit at breakfast or for a morning snack.
- Add raw vegetables to your sandwich at lunch, or bring homemade soup with vegetables to school or work.
- Eat 2 different vegetables at supper.
- Add fruit to salads, yogurt, and cereal.
- Add vegetables to casseroles, chili, and sauces.
- Have fruit as dessert.
- Try a new vegetable and fruit every month.



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## Choose whole grains

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- Read the ingredient lists on food packages. Look for the words *whole grain* on packages of bread, cereal, crackers, pasta, and couscous.

Here's an example of an ingredient list on whole grain bread:

**Ingredients:** Whole grain whole wheat flour, water, yeast, sugar, vegetable oil, wheat gluten, salt, vinegar, calcium propionate, sorbic acid, monoglycerides.

- Try quinoa, barley, bulgur, or brown rice with your meals.

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## Eat more beans, peas, and lentils

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- At some of your meals, replace meat with cooked, dried beans, peas, or lentils.
- Add kidney beans, chickpeas, and lentils to soups, casseroles, salads, and spaghetti sauce.
- Try hummus with vegetables at a meal or snack.

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## Use heart healthy fats every day

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Use **small amounts of healthy fats** like the ones below.

- olive, canola, peanut, sunflower oil
- soft margarines with 0 grams trans fat
- ground flax, chia seeds, or hemp seeds; add these to yogurt, cereal, salad, smoothies
- small amounts of nuts like walnuts, almonds, pecans, pistachios



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## Reduce unhealthy fat

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- Choose lean meat and cut off the fat before cooking.
- Take the skin off chicken before cooking.
- Limit butter, cream, and lard.
- Avoid hard margarine, shortening, and foods with *hydrogenated oil* in the ingredient list.
- Limit fried and deep fried foods.

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## Enjoy fish at least 2 times a week

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- Eat fish high in omega-3 fats: salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, trout, Arctic char.
- Choose fresh, frozen, or no salt added canned fish.

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## Eat foods with calcium

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Try to have at least 2 servings of foods higher in calcium every day.

**Examples of foods higher in calcium:**

- milk or yogurt, 0% (skim) or 1% milk fat (M.F.)
- cheese with less than 20% M.F.
- fortified soy, almond, and rice beverages; read labels to find brands which have been fortified with calcium (almond and rice beverages are much lower in protein than milk and soy beverages)
- tofu made with calcium
- salmon or sardines, canned with bones



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## Limit the alcohol you drink

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- If you use alcohol, follow these guidelines:
  - for everyone: 2 or less drinks a day
  - for women: 9 or less drinks a week
  - for men: 14 or less drinks a week
- One drink of alcohol is:
  - 12 ounces (355 mL) of beer
  - 5 ounces (148 mL) of wine
  - 1½ ounces (44 mL) of liquor

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## Limit caffeine

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Caffeine is found in coffee and coffee-based drinks, tea, colas and other pop, and energy drinks.

Limit caffeine to no more than 400 mg a day. This is equal to 2–3 cups (8 ounces each) or 500–750 mL of coffee.

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## Lifestyle tips:

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### Manage your weight

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If you're at a healthy weight, try to stay there.

If you have extra weight, losing even a small amount of weight can lower your blood pressure. Losing 5 kg (11 lbs) or more may lower your blood pressure further.

- Making healthy nutrition and lifestyle choices, like the ones in this handout, may help you to manage your weight.
- After you have lost weight, carry on with your healthy choices to maintain your weight loss.

If you don't know what a healthy weight is for you, or would like help to manage your weight, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian.

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## Be active everyday

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Activity helps to lower your risk for heart disease and other diseases. It may help lower your blood pressure and improve your blood cholesterol. Activity also makes you stronger, and may give you a better quality of life.

- If you're not active now, check with your doctor or healthcare provider before you start being active. Start with a few minutes a day and increase your time slowly.
- Be active for at least 30–60 minutes, 4–7 days a week.
- Choose activities that make your heart beat faster:
  - brisk walking
  - swimming
  - bike riding
  - sports
  - running

You should breathe faster but still be able to talk.

- On at least 2 days a week do activities to strengthen your muscle and bone:
  - heavy yard work
  - lifting weights
  - yoga

- A pedometer is a device that counts how many steps you take as you walk or run. Use a pedometer and write your steps in a journal.

Review your journal to watch your progress, create daily step goals, and stay on track.

- If you're not sure what type and amount of physical activity is right for you, ask your healthcare provider.



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## Learn ways to manage stress

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Think about things that help you to feel relaxed when you're stressed.

Talk to your friends or a healthcare provider about ideas to help you manage stress.

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## If you smoke, quit

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Each cigarette you smoke raises your blood pressure for a little while. One of the best ways to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke is to quit smoking.

For help quitting, talk to your healthcare provider, call 811 (Health Link), or visit [albertaquits.ca](http://albertaquits.ca).

## Next steps

This handout includes lifestyle choices that can help you manage your blood pressure. Change can be hard, especially if we try to make too many changes at once.

When you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, and break your goals into small steps. You're more likely to achieve smaller goals.

Ask your healthcare provider if you would like support with goal setting.

## Do you have more questions?

If you would like more support, ask your healthcare team to refer you to a dietitian.

You can find out more about blood pressure at [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](http://MyHealth.Alberta.ca).