

High Blood Pressure: Care Instructions



Overview

It's normal for blood pressure to go up and down throughout the day. But if it stays up, you have high blood pressure. Another name for high blood pressure is hypertension.

Despite what a lot of people think, high blood pressure usually doesn't cause headaches or make you feel dizzy or lightheaded. It usually has no symptoms. But it does increase your risk of stroke, heart attack, and other problems. You and your doctor will talk about your risks of these problems based on your blood pressure.

Your doctor will give you a goal for your blood pressure. Your goal will be based on your health and your age.

Lifestyle changes, such as eating healthy and being active, are always important to help lower blood pressure. You might also take medicine to reach your blood pressure goal.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Medical treatment

- If you stop taking your medicine, your blood pressure will go back up. You may take one or more types of medicine to lower your blood pressure. Be safe with medicines. Take your medicine exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Talk to your doctor before you start taking aspirin every day. Aspirin can help certain people lower their risk of a heart attack or stroke. But taking aspirin isn't right for everyone, because it can cause serious bleeding.
- See your doctor regularly. You may need to see the doctor more often at first or until your blood pressure comes down.
- If you are taking blood pressure medicine, talk to your doctor before you take decongestants or anti-inflammatory medicine, such as ibuprofen. Some of these medicines can raise blood pressure.
- Learn how to check your blood pressure at home.

Lifestyle changes

- Stay at a healthy weight. This is especially important if you put on weight around the waist. Losing even 10 pounds can help you lower your blood pressure.
- If your doctor recommends it, get more exercise. Walking is a good choice. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk every day. Try for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. You also may want to swim, bike, or do other activities.
- Avoid or limit alcohol. Talk to your doctor about whether you can drink any alcohol.
- Try to limit how much sodium you eat to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day. Your doctor may ask you to try to eat less than 1,500 mg a day.
- Eat plenty of fruits (such as bananas and oranges), vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.
- Lower the amount of saturated fat in your diet. Saturated fat is found in animal products such as milk, cheese, and meat. Limiting these foods may help you lose weight and also lower your risk for heart disease.
- Do not smoke. Smoking increases your risk for heart attack and stroke. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.

When should you call for help?

Call anytime you think you may need emergency care. This may mean having symptoms that suggest that your blood pressure is causing a serious heart or blood vessel problem. Your blood pressure may be over 180/120.

For example, call if:

- You have symptoms of a heart attack. These may include:
 - Chest pain or pressure, or a strange feeling in the chest.
 - Sweating.
 - Shortness of breath.
 - Nausea or vomiting.
 - Pain, pressure, or a strange feeling in the back, neck, jaw, or upper belly or in one or both shoulders or arms.
 - Lightheadedness or sudden weakness.
 - A fast or irregular heartbeat.
- You have symptoms of a stroke. These may include:
 - Sudden numbness, tingling, weakness, or loss of movement in your face, arm, or leg, especially on only one side of your body.
 - Sudden vision changes.
 - Sudden trouble speaking.
 - Sudden confusion or trouble understanding simple statements.
 - Sudden problems with walking or balance.
 - A sudden, severe headache that is different from past headaches.
- You have severe back or belly pain.

Do not wait until your blood pressure comes down on its own. Get help right away.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate care if:

- Your blood pressure is much higher than normal (such as 180/120 or higher), but you don't have symptoms.
- You think high blood pressure is causing symptoms, such as:
 - Severe headache.

- Blurry vision.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your blood pressure measures higher than your doctor recommends at least 2 times. That means the top number is higher or the bottom number is higher, or both.
- You think you may be having side effects from your blood pressure medicine.

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