# 8 Ways to Reach a Healthy Blood Pressure

To take care of your heart, it’s important to know and track your blood pressure. Millions of Americans have high blood pressure, also called hypertension, but many don’t realize it or aren’t keeping it at a healthy level.

For most adults, healthy blood pressure is 120/80 millimeters of mercury or less. Blood pressure consistently above 130/80 millimeters of mercury increases your risk for heart disease, kidney disease, eye damage, dementia and stroke. Your doctor might recommend lowering your blood pressure if it’s between 120/80 and 130/80 and you have other risk factors for heart or blood vessel disease.

High blood pressure is often “silent,” meaning it doesn’t usually cause symptoms but can damage your body, especially your heart over time. Having poor heart health also increases the risk of severe illness from COVID-19. While you can’t control everything that increases your risk for high blood pressure – it runs in families, often increases with age and varies by race and ethnicity – there are things you can do. Consider these tips from experts with the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute’s (NHLBI) The Heart Truth program:

1. **Know Your Numbers.** Everyone ages 3 and older should get their blood pressure checked by a health care provider at least once a year. Expert advice: 30 minutes before your test, don’t exercise, drink caffeine or smoke cigarettes. Right before, go to the bathroom. During the test, rest your arm on a table at the level of your heart and put your feet flat on the floor. Relax and don’t talk.
2. **Eat Healthy.** Follow a heart-healthy eating plan, such as NHLBI’s Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH). For example, use herbs for flavor instead of salt and add one fruit or vegetable to every meal.
3. **Move More.** Get at least 2 1/2 hours of physical activity each week to help lower and control blood pressure. To ensure you’re reducing your sitting throughout the day and getting active, try breaking your activity up. Do 10 minutes of exercise, three times a day or one 30-minute session on five separate days each week. Any amount of physical activity is better than none and all activity counts.
4. **Aim for a Healthy Weight.** If you’re overweight, losing just 3-5% of your weight can improve blood pressure. If you weigh 200 pounds, that’s a loss of 6-10 pounds. To lose weight, ask a friend or family member for help or to join a weight loss program with you. Social support can help keep you motivated.
5. **Manage Stress.** Stress can increase your blood pressure and make your body store more fat. Reduce stress with meditation, relaxing activities or support from a counselor or online group.
6. **Have a Healthy Pregnancy.** High blood pressure during pregnancy can harm the mother and baby. It also increases a woman’s risk of having high blood pressure later in life. Talk to your health care provider about high blood pressure. Ask if your blood pressure is normal and track it during and after pregnancy. If you’re planning to become pregnant, start monitoring it now.
7. **Stop Smoking.** The chemicals in tobacco smoke can harm your heart and blood vessels. Seek out resources, such as smoke free hotlines and text message programs, that offer free support and information.
8. **Work with Your Doctor.** Get help setting your target blood pressure. Write down your numbers every time you get your blood pressure checked. Ask if you should monitor your blood pressure from home. Take all prescribed medications as directed and keep up your healthy lifestyle. If seeing a doctor worries you, ask to have your blood pressure taken more than once during a visit to get an accurate reading.

To find more information about high blood pressure as well as resources for tracking your numbers, visit [nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/high-blood-pressure).