# A Healthy Blood Pressure: What Women Need to Know

High blood pressure, or hypertension, affects millions of men and women of all ages. It causes serious health problems and harms your heart. While having a healthy blood pressure is important for everyone, it’s especially important for women, and it’s never too early to start thinking about keeping it in a healthy range. In fact, about 17% of women in their 20s and 30s—almost 1 in 5— already have high blood pressure. That number more than doubles for women in their 40s. Slightly more women than men die of high blood pressure, and it can also cause complications during and after pregnancy.

Here are some facts, tips, and resources to help you keep your blood pressure in a healthy range.

## Know Your Numbers: What’s a Healthy Blood Pressure?

For most adults, a healthy blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm/Hg (millimeters of mercury). Blood pressure consistently above 130/80 mm/Hg increases your risk for heart disease, kidney disease, eye damage, dementia, and stroke. Your doctor may advise you to lower your blood pressure if it’s between 120/80 mm/Hg and 130/80 mm/Hg and you’re at risk for heart or blood vessel disease.

## Know Your Risks: High Blood Pressure Has Many Causes

Anyone can develop high blood pressure, but some things increase the risk. For women, this includes taking oral birth control, having premenstrual migraines, and having certain health problems during pregnancy. Being overweight or obese, having an unhealthy diet, or experiencing high levels of stress also increase blood pressure. Other causes include some health conditions, your genes—high blood pressure runs in families, and, importantly, your race. Research shows that discrimination is a source of chronic stress that may increase the risk of developing high blood pressure.

* Among African Americans, two-thirds of women in their 40s have high blood pressure. African Americans tend to get high blood pressure earlier in life, and when they do, they often have higher blood pressure numbers. Also, some blood pressure medicines may not work as well for African Americans.
* Among Asian American women age 20 and older who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, only about 14% have their blood pressure under control, in part because health care providers may overlook their risk. Asian women may need to start the conversation about blood pressure with their health care providers.

## Know Yourself: Pay Attention to Your Well-Being

High blood pressure is often called the “silent killer” because people can’t generally feel if they have it. However, you may have warning signs that you’ve been writing off as just stress or symptoms of menopause. These include tiredness, low energy, sleeping problems, hot flashes, fluid retention, headaches, blurred vision, and chest pain (as some women report their “bra feels too tight”). If something doesn’t feel right, don’t tough it out—check it out. Learn what your blood pressure is. Make an appointment with your health care provider or get it measured at one of the blood pressure monitors found in pharmacies or grocery stores. If it’s high, ask your provider what to do to get—and keep—your blood pressure in a healthy range.

## Know the Steps: Make a Healthy Blood Pressure To-Do List

Many self-care activities, such as exercising, eating healthy, and taking time to de-stress, help control blood pressure. Here are some tips to help:

* Move More: To help lower or control your blood pressure, aim for 150 minutes (2½ hours) a week of moderate-level [physical activity](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/all-publications-and-resources/move-more-making-physical-activity-routine), like brisk walking. You can tell you’re moving enough if your heart is beating faster, you’re breathing harder, and you’re breaking a sweat. Try 5 days a week, 30 minutes a day. You can break that down into chunks of 10 minutes, three times a day. Find what works for you.
* Eat Healthy: Avoid having too much salt (sodium), too little potassium, or too much alcohol. Use herbs for flavor instead of salt. Add at least one fruit or vegetable to every meal. Sample the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute’s (NHLBI’s) delicious [heart-healthy recipes](https://healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov/default.aspx). Following a heart-healthy eating plan, such as the NHLBI’s Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension ([DASH](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan)), may make it easier to eat right. DASH is scientifically proven to lower high blood pressure.
* Aim for a Healthy Weight: Losing just 3-5% of your weight can improve blood pressure if you’re overweight. If you weigh 200 pounds, that’s 6-10 pounds. To lose weight, ask a friend or family member to join a weight loss program with you. Social support can help keep you motivated.
* Manage Stress: Stress can increase your blood pressure and make your body store more fat. Reduce [stress](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/heart-truth/get-quality-sleep-and-reduce-stress) with meditation, relaxing activities, support from a counselor or online group, or another approach that works for you. What do you find relaxing?
* Quit Smoking: Any amount of smoking, even light or occasional smoking, damages your heart and blood vessels. Call 1–800–QUIT–NOW and visit [smokefree.gov](file:///%5C%5CWESTAT.COM%5CDFS%5Ceditgrp%5Cproj%5C6556%5C6556.04.01.01.03%5CWomen%20and%20BP%5CWord%20%28508%20compliant%29%5Csmokefree.gov) to learn about different options to help you quit.

**Know What? There’s a Correct Way To Check Blood Pressure**

Get your blood pressure checked at least once a year. Your health care provider may suggest checking your blood pressure yourself, too. Here’s the correct way:

* 30 minutes before your test, avoid exercising, drinking caffeine, or smoking 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.

## Know the Facts: Blood Pressure Control is Vital to a Healthy Pregnancy

It’s important to keep your blood pressure under control before, during, and after pregnancy. One in 12-17 pregnant women have high blood pressure. Blood pressure can increase during pregnancy. Know and monitor your numbers. 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.

* Keep moving during pregnancy—aim for 30 to 60 minutes two to seven times a week to lower the risk of high blood pressure.
* If you already take high blood pressure medicine, make sure it is still safe to use when pregnant.

Check out more [tips](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/all-publications-and-resources/self-care-tips-heart-health) to make taking care of your blood pressure part of your self-care routine. Visit [hearttruth.gov](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/heart-truth/toolkits) to learn more about high blood pressure and find resources to help you track your numbers.