



# Healthy Blood Pressure for Healthy Hearts

Small Steps to Take Control



Every time your heart beats, it pumps blood through vessels, called arteries, to the rest of your body. Your blood pressure measures how hard your blood pushes against the walls of the arteries. If your blood flows at higher-than-normal pressures, you may have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension. This is a major risk factor for heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the United States.

## Taking the first step toward a healthy blood pressure

Making lifestyle changes now can help keep your blood pressure in a healthy range— whether you have high blood pressure or you're trying to prevent it. You don't have to make big changes all at once. Small steps can get you where you want to go. Here are some ideas to start. If you have elevated blood pressure and your doctor prescribes medications, make sure to take them as directed.

### Eat Healthy Foods

A diet low in sodium and saturated fat—like the DASH eating plan— can lower your blood pressure as effectively as medicines, as much as 8-14 mmHg.

### Aim for a Healthy Weight

Losing just 5 percent of your body weight can lower your blood pressure 10-20 mmHg. If you weigh 200 lbs., that's a weight loss of only 10 lbs.

### Move More

Get at least 2 1/2 hours of physical activity a week to help lower and control blood pressure. That's just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, which can lower your blood pressure by 4-9 mmHg.

### Stop Smoking

The chemicals in tobacco smoke can harm your heart and blood vessels. Quitting is hard. But many people have done it, and you can, too. Ask your doctor about help with quitting.

### Manage Stress

Stress can contribute to high blood pressure and other heart risks. Persistent stress can also make your body store more fat. If you are struggling to manage stress talk with your doctor.

## High blood pressure is a “silent killer”

High blood pressure doesn't usually cause symptoms that you feel or notice, but it can damage your body over time. If your blood pressure stays higher than 130/80 mmHg for a period of time, it can cause serious and potentially irreversible health problems such as:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Kidney disease
- Dementia

The only way to know whether your blood pressure is controlled is to measure your blood pressure regularly. Measure daily with feet on the floor, arm at the level of your heart after resting for 5 minutes and avoid talking while your blood pressure machine is on. Bring your blood pressure log to your medical appointments. Also bring your home machine yearly to ensure it is accurate.

**For additional resources to help with healthy diet and lifestyle, weight loss, stress management, and smoking cessation, or to register for a class, please visit us at [livinghealthy.ucdavis.edu](http://livinghealthy.ucdavis.edu)**

