

## High Blood Pressure | *Lifestyle Changes to Help Lower Your Blood Pressure*

### **How do tobacco products affect blood pressure?**

The nicotine in cigarettes and other tobacco products causes your blood vessels to constrict and your heart to beat faster, which temporarily raises your blood pressure. If you quit smoking or using other tobacco products, you can significantly lower your risk of heart disease and heart attack, as well as help lower your blood pressure.

### **What about losing weight and exercising?**

If you're overweight, losing weight usually helps lower blood pressure. Regular exercise is a good way to lose weight. It also seems to lower high blood pressure even if you don't lose weight.

### **Is sodium really off limits?**

Not everyone is affected by sodium, but sodium can increase blood pressure in some people. Most Americans who have a healthy blood pressure should limit the sodium in their diet to 2,300 mg per day. African Americans, older Americans, and people who have high blood pressure should limit the sodium in their diet to 1,500 mg per day. Your doctor may tell you to limit your sodium even more.

To lower your sodium intake, don't add salt to your food. Check food labels for sodium. While some foods, such as potato chips, obviously have a lot of sodium, you may not realize how much sodium is in food like bread, canned vegetables, soups, and cheese. Also be aware that some medicines contain sodium.

### **Do I need to quit drinking alcohol altogether?**

In some people, alcohol causes blood pressure to rise quite a lot. In other people, it doesn't. If you drink alcohol, limit it to no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 drinks per day for men. One drink is a can of beer, a glass of wine (4-5 oz.), or 1 shot (jigger) of liquor. If your blood pressure increases when you drink alcohol, it's best not to drink any alcohol.

### **Does stress affect my blood pressure?**

Stress may affect blood pressure. To help combat the effects of stress, try relaxation techniques or biofeedback. These things work best when used at least once a day. Ask your family doctor for advice.

### **How can I know if changing my lifestyle is helping?**

One of the best ways is to get a home blood pressure monitor and use it to see whether what you are doing is lowering your blood pressure numbers. Ask your doctor to recommend a monitor.

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