

Limiting Sodium and Salt

A low-sodium diet can help you manage your blood pressure. Try to use low-sodium and “no added salt” foods and seasonings at the table or while cooking. Food labels tell you what you need to know about choosing foods that are lower in sodium. Try to eat no more than 2,300 mg sodium a day. If you have high blood pressure, you may need to restrict your sodium intake even more.

The following is a good heart-healthy eating plan, even for those who don’t have high blood pressure.

- Whole grains
- Fruits, such as apples, bananas, oranges, pears, and prunes
- Vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage, and carrots
- Legumes, such as kidney beans, lentils, chick peas, black-eyed peas, and lima beans
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy products, such as skim milk
- Fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna, and trout, about twice a week

When following a heart-healthy diet, you should avoid eating a lot of red meat, palm and coconut oils and sugary foods and beverages

Being Physically Active

Routine physical activity can lower high blood pressure and reduce your risk for other health problems. Everyone should try to participate in moderate-intensity aerobic exercise at least 2 hours and 30 minutes per week, or vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise for 1 hour and 15 minutes per week. Aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, is any exercise in which your heart beats harder and you use more oxygen than usual.

Maintaining a Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight can help you control high blood pressure and reduce your risk for other health problems. If you’re overweight or obese, try to lose weight. A useful measure of overweight and obesity is body mass index (BMI). BMI measures your weight in relation to your height. To figure out your BMI, check out the link to calculate BMI on the Links page.

A BMI:

- Below 18.5 is a sign that you are underweight.
- Between 18.5 and 24.9 is in the healthy range.
- Between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight.
- Of 30 or more is considered obese.

Measuring waist circumference helps screen for possible health risks. This risk may be high with a waist size that is greater than 35 inches for women or greater than 40 inches for men.

Limiting Alcohol Intake

Limit alcohol intake. Too much alcohol will raise your blood pressure and triglyceride levels, a type of fat found in the blood. Alcohol also adds extra calories, which may cause weight gain. Men should have no more than two drinks containing alcohol a day. Women should have no more than one drink containing alcohol a day. One drink is:

- 12 ounces of beer
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1½ ounces of liquor