



# Nutrition for Older Adults: Diet and Health Guidelines To Lower The Risk Of High Blood Pressure

## EXTENSION

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## High Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the pressure on the blood vessel walls. When you get your blood pressure taken you will be told two numbers, such as 120/80. The first number is called systolic blood pressure. This is the pressure when the heart contracts. The second number is called diastolic blood pressure. This is the pressure when the heart is resting between contractions.

Normal blood pressure is systolic less than 120 and diastolic less than 80. Elevated blood pressure is systolic 120 to 129 and diastolic less than 80. High blood pressure stage 1 is systolic 130 to 139 or diastolic 80 to 89. High blood pressure stage 2 is systolic 140 or greater or diastolic 90 or greater.

High blood pressure is a serious health problem. High blood pressure causes the heart to work harder and over time may damage blood vessels. Damage to blood vessels in the:

- Heart—may increase the risk of heart disease.
- Brain—may increase the risk of stroke.
- Kidney—may increase the risk of kidney damage.

People need to have their blood pressure checked at least every two years. High blood pressure can progress silently and without symptoms. Some estimate that one-

third of people with high blood pressure are unaware they have it.

## Risk Factors for High Blood Pressure

There are many factors that may increase the risk of high blood pressure:

- Family history of high blood pressure.
  - High blood pressure tends to run in families.
- Being overweight.
  - Excess weight especially in the abdomen is a risk for high blood pressure.
- Increasing age.
  - Blood pressure tends to increase with age.
- Physical inactivity. Physical inactivity can contribute to:
  - Weight gain.
  - Negative effects on cholesterol (higher LDL-cholesterol and lower HDL-cholesterol).
- Smoking. Smoking can:
  - Raise heart rate and blood pressure.
  - Lower HDL-cholesterol.
  - Increase the tendency to form blood clots.
- Diabetes.
  - Uncontrolled diabetes can increase the risk of high blood pressure.

- High sodium intake, among sodium sensitive people, is linked to high blood pressure. People more likely to be sodium sensitive are those who:
  - Have a family history of high blood pressure.
  - Have diabetes.
  - Are African American.
  - Are over 50 years of age.
  - Are overweight.
- High alcohol intake.
  - Heavy alcohol intake, three or more drinks daily, is linked with increased risk of high blood pressure.
- High fat, saturated fat and trans fat intakes.
  - High fat, saturated fat and trans fat intakes are linked to atherosclerosis and risk of high blood pressure.
- Low potassium, calcium and magnesium intake.
  - Low intakes of potassium, calcium and magnesium may increase the risk of high blood pressure.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
  - Moderate weight loss may be all some people need to do to help control their blood pressure.
- Be physically active each day. Recommendations are at least 150 minutes to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week, or 75 minutes to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity or an equal combination of moderate and vigorous-intensity physical activity.
- Consume ample fruits, vegetables and low-fat milk to provide calcium, potassium and magnesium.
  - Adequate intakes of these minerals may have a protective effect against high blood pressure.
- Choose foods with less total fat, saturated fat and trans fat.
  - When using fats choose polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats over saturated and trans fats.
- Choose foods with less added salt.
- Use alcohol in moderation.
  - Moderate alcohol intake is not more than one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men.
- Abstain from smoking.
- Keep diabetes in control.

## Advice To Lower Risk of High Blood Pressure

Some guidelines to help lower risk of high blood pressure are:

### Sources

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