

# Taking Care of Your Blood Pressure

## What is blood pressure?

- Blood pressure is one way to measure how well your heart is working. Blood pressure is the force of the heart pushing blood out with each heartbeat. It helps move blood through your body.
- Blood vessels are like pipes that carry oxygen-rich blood to every part of your body, including your heart and brain. If your blood vessels are healthy, they are strong and bendable and help to move blood along.



## What is the problem?

- If your blood vessels are not healthy, it may be hard for your heart to push blood through your body. If your heart has to work very hard to push blood through, then your blood pressure numbers will be higher. We call this **high blood pressure** or **hypertension**.
- You may have high blood pressure if you are overweight, eat too much salt, smoke, drink too much alcohol, or do not exercise. High blood pressure may also run in your family.
- High blood pressure can lead to many health problems like:
  - Stroke, or “brain attack”
  - Heart attack
  - Heart failure
  - Kidney problems
  - Vision changes and blindness.



## What are the numbers?

It is important to know your blood pressure numbers. An example blood pressure is  $\frac{120}{90}$ . We say “120 over 90.”

- **The top number** is called the systolic reading. It is the pressure in the blood vessels when your heart is pumping.
  - The best top number is below 120.
  - A top number higher than 140 would mean high blood pressure.
  - My top number \_\_\_\_\_
- **The bottom number** is called the diastolic reading. It measures the pressure when your heart is resting in between beats. Rest is important for the heart too.
  - The best bottom number is below 80.
  - A bottom number higher than 90 would mean high blood pressure.
  - My bottom number \_\_\_\_\_



**The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it checked often and to know your numbers.** High blood pressure is sometimes called “The Silent Killer” because you may have it for years without feeling any differently.

# How can I lower my blood pressure?

## 1) MEDICATION

Medications work to improve your blood pressure in several ways:

- Helping your kidneys flush extra salt and water out in your urine (“water pill”)
- Causing the heart muscle to relax and beat with less force
- Causing blood vessels to relax and expand so there is more space for blood to flow

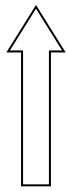


Always take medicines as directed. Keep taking your medicine, even when you feel good! Ask your health care provider if you have questions about your medicine.

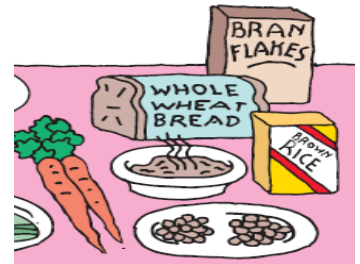
## 2) HEALTHY EATING

Eating heart-healthy foods can help lower your blood pressure.

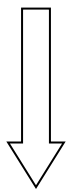
**Eat more** of these foods:



- Fruits and vegetables
- Low-fat or fat-free cheeses and milk
- Fish; lean cuts of meat; turkey and chicken with no skin
- Cereals, pasta, lentils, beans
- Whole grain breads, corn tortillas
- Salt-free seasoning substitute or herbs and spices for flavor



**Cut back** on these foods:



- Whole milk, cream, high-fat cheeses, butter, ice cream
- Fatty cuts of meat
- Sausages, hot dogs, bologna, egg yolks
- Lard, oils, and butter used for cooking (Bake, don't fry!)
- Salty snacks like potato chips
- Fast food
- Salt / sodium (look for “low-sodium” or “sodium-free” foods)



Changing eating habits can be hard. Call (502) 772-8588 for more information about healthy eating classes and cooking demonstrations.

## 3) PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity makes the heart stronger, so it doesn't have to squeeze with as much force. Try for 30 minutes of walking or other activity on most days. Talk with your health care provider about a safe exercise routine. Call (502) 772-8588 for information about low-cost exercise classes.



## 4) STOP SMOKING



Quitting smoking can help lower your blood pressure and may also reduce your risks for heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Call (502) 772-8588 or (800) QUIT NOW for more information about how to stop smoking.

## 5) MANAGE STRESS

Stress is connected to high blood pressure and heart health. Reduce stress by getting enough rest, regular physical activity, setting realistic goals, and using relaxation techniques. Yoga classes, which include deep breathing and stretching, are great for lowering stress. Call (502) 772-8588 for more information about low-cost Yoga classes.

