

Summer 2024

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Q&A: How to prevent — and control — high blood pressure

Q. What causes high blood pressure?

A. People have **high blood pressure**, or hypertension, if their blood pressure is 130/80 mmHg or higher. Several factors contribute to the development of hypertension, including genetics, health conditions, and lifestyle habits. Specifically, diet and exercise play a role. A diet high in salt can raise blood pressure, while regular physical activity helps lower it by maintaining heart health. Without proper treatment, high blood pressure can be a serious problem and may lead to stroke, heart disease, and other conditions.

Q. Who is most at risk for high blood pressure?

A. High blood pressure affects about half of adults in the United States. You may be more likely to develop hypertension if you:

- Have elevated (slightly higher than normal) blood pressure — that is, 120 to 129 mmHg
- Are older than age 65
- Have diabetes
- Smoke
- Have a family history of hypertension
- Are overweight

Race may also play a role. According to the CDC, African American people develop high

blood pressure more often — and at an earlier age — than people who are White, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or Alaska Native.

Q. Can I avoid developing high blood pressure?

A. Healthy lifestyle choices may help prevent as well as control high blood pressure. A few habits you can incorporate into your routine include:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Watching your salt intake
- Limiting alcohol to one or two drinks a day
- Getting 30 minutes of physical activity a day, five days per week
- Eating a low-fat diet rich in fruits, vegetables, dairy products, whole grains, fish, and lean meats
- Getting enough calcium and other minerals
- Not smoking

If lifestyle alone doesn't control your high blood pressure, talk with your doctor. You may need medication to help manage it.

Boost your heart health

Brisk walking is an easy way to start. The key is to get your heart rate elevated. Want to take a free fitness class? Check out Shape Up NYC by clicking [here](#).



How to check your blood pressure at home



When it comes to high blood pressure, knowing your numbers can save your life. Having high blood pressure damages your arteries and can lead to a heart attack. But because high pressure has no symptoms, the only way to tell if it's high is to get it checked.

Checking your blood pressure at home is easy. Use these tips to help you get accurate readings.

Choose the right monitor

Look for a cuff-style monitor that fits around your upper arm. Bring the monitor to your doctor to make sure you're using it correctly.

Prepare yourself

Try to take the readings at the same time every day. Also remember to:

- Sit with both feet on the floor. Don't cross your legs.
- Support your arm on a flat surface and wrap the cuff right above your elbow.
- Wrap the cuff directly on your arm, not over clothing.
- Take two readings, with a minute break between each.
- Write your readings on a tracker. Some models may have a built-in tracker.

Understand your numbers

Talk with your doctor about where your numbers should be. Generally, this is what the numbers mean:

- Less than 120/80 mmHg is considered normal.
- 120–129/80 mmHg means your blood pressure is elevated.
- 130–139/80–89 mmHg means you have stage 1 high blood pressure.
- 140/90 mmHg or higher means you have stage 2 high blood pressure.

- 180/120 mmHg or higher is a hypertensive crisis, which is very dangerous. If your reading is this high, you should call your doctor right away.

Learn how to manage your blood pressure

Knowing your numbers is key, but you can also do the following to lower your blood pressure:

- Eat a heart-healthy diet.
- Don't smoke or vape.
- Add exercise to your day.
- Find ways to manage your stress.

Are you checking your blood pressure?

Watch a step-by-step video to learn how to take your blood pressure at home. To see the video, [click here](#).

9 tips for a healthy summer

The long, warm days just seem to invite kicking back and having fun. The last thing you want is health problems to spoil your plans. These tips will help you stay healthy so you can make the most of the sunshine season.

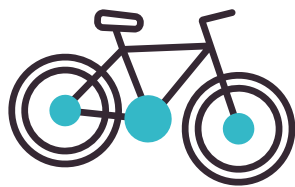
1 Go outside and play.

Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress and lower the risk for depression. During heat waves, try to only go outside early in the morning or in the evening, when temperatures are at their lowest.



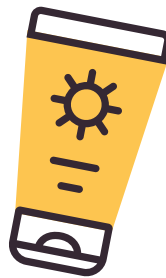
2 Hike, bike, swim.

Or grab your running shoes, a tennis racket, or even a push lawn mower. There are lots of ways to get your 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity. If it's too hot outside, hit the gym or visit an indoor basketball court.



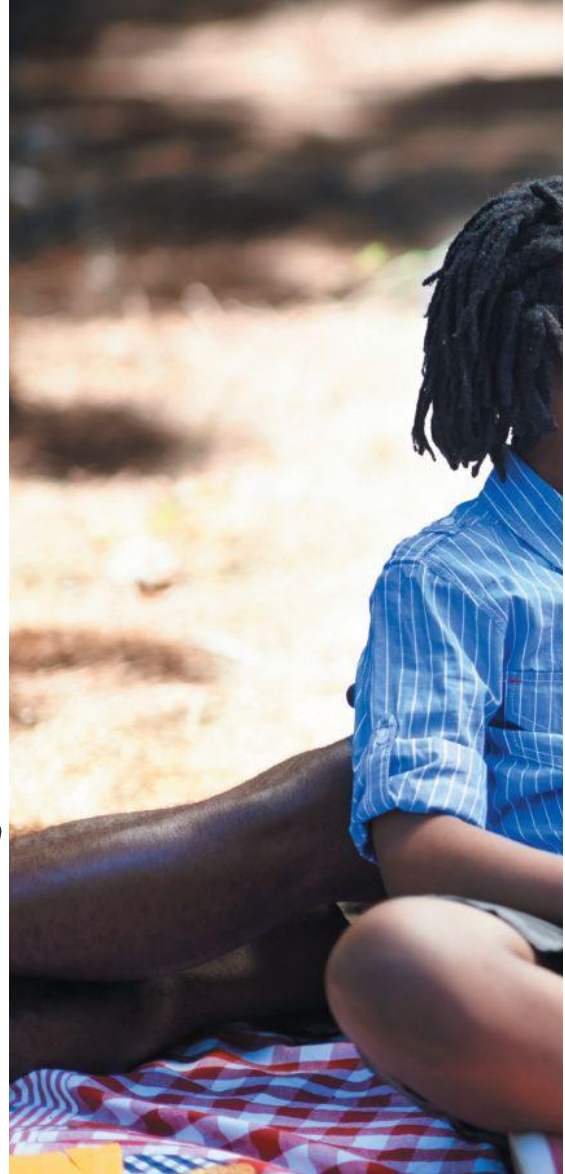
3 Slather on sunscreen.

Tans fade, but sun damage lasts forever. People with pale skin may need to be especially careful, but people of all colors, including brown or black skin, are at risk for skin cancer. Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. Apply liberally, even on cloudy or cooler days. And don't forget your wide-brimmed hat and UV-blocking shades.



4 Stay cool in the heat.

To avoid getting overheated, wear light-colored, lightweight, loose-fitting clothes. Stay inside midday when the sun is the hottest. If you don't have air-conditioning or the power goes out, find somewhere you can cool off, like a library or public cooling center.



5 Guzzle more water.

Your body needs extra fluids in hot weather, especially if you're exercising or working in the heat. When water comes in a can or bottle, be aware of what else is packed inside. Some flavored waters can have as much sugar as a soda of the same size. If you're bored with plain water, flavor it yourself. Infuse it with fruit; vegetables, like cucumbers; or herbs, like mint.



Shedding light on skin cancer

Did you know that some types of medicine can make you more sensitive to the sun? To take a quiz, click [here](#).



6 Fire up the grill.

Throw on some fish, chicken, turkey burgers, or veggie kabobs. But be aware: Meat, poultry, or fish grilled by some methods can form chemicals that may increase the risk for cancer. To reduce the risk, line the grill with foil that has holes poked in it. Remove any charred bits before eating.



7 Visit a farmers market.

Or grow your own food garden and get some bonus physical activity. Summer is prime time for a host of delicious, nutritious fruits and veggies, including blueberries, green beans, strawberries, and tomatoes.



8 Pack a safe picnic.

Keep in mind that foodborne bacteria thrive at warm temperatures. To fend off food poisoning, store cold food in a cooler at 40 degrees or lower.



9 Shoo away the bugs.

Apply insect repellent to exposed skin and clothing, following product directions. Wash it off when you come inside, and check your skin, clothing, and gear for any ticks.



Finally, take an extended break from work stress if you can, whether for a weeklong trip or weekend staycation in the city!

Feeling lonely? You're not alone

Even if you have friends, it's possible to feel alone or disconnected from others. Not all friendships are close, meaningful relationships or offer a sense of belonging.

Loneliness results from the difference between the level of connection you want and the level you have.

This widespread problem can harm people's physical and mental health. For example, it has been linked to increased risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Loneliness has also been shown to increase the risk for addiction,

anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide. Some people are more at risk than others. These groups include:

- Anyone with a disability or chronic health condition
- Adults who have a low income
- Young adults

Ways to connect with others

There are many ways to build more social connections. What works will not be the same for everyone. Here are some ideas:

- Meet new people by volunteering; taking a class; or joining a book, sports, art, or other club. Many NYC parks offer fun, informative, and healthy events. To browse a calendar of events, click [here](#). For local volunteer opportunities, click [here](#).

- Invite others to join you for exercise, meals, and other activities you already do. This can help with a busy schedule.
- Do not let technology use keep you from interacting with people.

How to get support

Open up to your doctor about your feelings or concerns. They can help you get better, such as referring you to a mental health care provider, if needed.

Get help in a crisis

In a crisis, seek help right away. You can get emotional support from:

- **988 Lifeline Chat and Text.** To talk with a trained counselor, call or text **988** or chat online at 988lifeline.org/chat. Specialized services include Spanish-speaking counselors and 24/7 LGBTQI+ support for those younger than age 25.

We're here for you

MetroPlusHealth offers behavioral services and programs for children, teens, and adults. To learn more, click [here](#).



4 red-flag symptoms of colon cancer you shouldn't ignore

If you're younger than age 50, you may believe that colon cancer isn't something you need to think about right now. But cases of colon cancer in your age group have actually been on the rise. And unlike an older adult, you may not be routinely screened for the disease.

That makes it especially important to know how to recognize the warning signs of colon cancer. This could help you catch it at an early stage, when it's easier to treat.

What to watch for

When colon cancer is diagnosed before age 50, it's referred to as "early onset." A recent study published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* looked for red-flag signs and symptoms of this condition in younger adults.

Researchers analyzed data from more than 5,000 people with early-onset colon cancer and compared it with data from similar individuals who didn't have cancer. In the three months to two years leading up to diagnosis, four signs and symptoms were more common in the colon cancer group:

- Stomach pain
- Rectal bleeding
- Diarrhea
- Iron-deficiency anemia (lack of enough iron in the body, which can be diagnosed through blood tests)

Having just one of these red-flag signs nearly doubled the risk of being diagnosed with early-onset colon cancer. The more signs a person had, the likelier a diagnosis became.

Take action today

These steps can improve your chances of finding colon cancer at an early, more treatable stage:

Contact your doctor immediately if you have these symptoms. Often, these symptoms are caused by something other than colon cancer. But if you do happen to have cancer, finding it early could save your life.



Talk with your doctor about when to start regular colon cancer screenings. Experts recommend starting routine screening at age 45. You may need to begin sooner if you have a family history of colon cancer or other risk factors.

Before your first screening, discuss testing options with your doctor. There are several screening methods, so talk about what's right for you and how often you need to be tested.

Are you at risk? Take this quiz.

Do you know your risk for colorectal cancer? To take a short quiz, click [here](#).

Boost health, save money with better habits

When we axe negative habits, our health gets a big boost. Take drinking alcohol in moderation, not smoking, and curbing soda intake, for instance. These three changes are associated with a lower risk for chronic diseases and a host of other benefits. Adopting these healthy habits can help you:

Drop pounds

Both soda and alcohol pack plenty of unwanted calories that can quickly show on the scale. By reducing or eliminating your intake, it's simpler to shed excess pounds. If smoking is your vice, stopping the habit can make exercising easier. For help, visit smokefree.gov or nysmokefree.com. You can also look for **local support groups** or contact the NY State Smokers' Quitline at **800.697.8487**.

Spend less

Need extra motivation to kick a bad habit? Watch your bank account grow. Alcohol, nicotine, and soda can all take a major toll on your budget. **Use this calculator** to see how much money you'll save by cutting out the unnecessary expense, and then plan what you'll do with your reward. Keep in mind, you'll save on long-term health costs, too!

Sleep sounder

Although alcohol can make you feel drowsy, it actually disrupts quality of sleep. Caffeinated sodas can keep you up at night. And people who use tobacco are more than twice as likely to report poor sleep compared with nonusers. Eliminate these habits and enjoy the benefits of better slumber — from improved mood and greater mental clarity to a stronger immune system and more. To take a sleep quiz, click [here](#).



Summer Trail Mix

Ingredients

- 1 cup wheat cereal
- ¼ cup dried fruit: raisins, blueberries, cranberries, chopped apricots, plums, or peaches, or a mixture
- ¼ cup cashews (1 oz.)

Directions

Mix ingredients, split into two servings, and store in sandwich-sized plastic bags.

Per serving

Makes 2 servings. Each serving contains about 192 calories, 5 g protein, 9 g fat, 28 g carbohydrates, 3 g fiber, and 115 mg sodium. To search for other healthy recipes, click [here](#).

