



# High Blood Pressure & Nutrition

**Blood pressure** is the force put on blood vessel walls when the heart pumps and relaxes with each heartbeat. Blood pressure helps move blood through the body.

High blood pressure is also called **hypertension**, and occurs when the heart works harder than normal to pump blood to the rest of the body's organs and tissues. Many people with high blood pressure do not feel sick, meaning they do not feel signs or symptoms. If not controlled, hypertension can increase risk for stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney problems, and eye problems.

The normal value for blood pressure is 120/80 mmHg or less. The top number is called the **systolic** reading, and represents the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart pumps. The bottom number is called the **diastolic** reading and represents the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart rests between beats.

Risk factors for high blood pressure include:

- Family history
- Overweight/obesity
- Excessive salt consumption
- Sedentary lifestyle (lack of exercise)



In some cases, the cause of high blood pressure is unknown. Although there is no cure, it can often be controlled through lifestyle changes and/or medication. Maintaining a healthy weight while adhering to the **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)** diet can help manage blood pressure.

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The **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)** diet provides an overall dietary pattern high in fiber, potassium, calcium, and magnesium and relatively low in sodium. The guidelines of the DASH diet include:

- Choosing 8-10 servings of fruits and vegetables a day
- Choosing 2-3 servings of fat-free or low-fat dairy products a day
- Choosing lean meats and skinless poultry over fatty meats
- Increasing fish consumption to at least twice a week, especially fatty fish containing heart healthy omega-3 fatty acids (salmon, tuna, and herring).
- Choosing unsalted or low-salt nuts, seeds, and beans.
- Limiting foods high in saturated fats and trans fats
- Increasing whole grains and high-fiber foods
- Limiting sodium intake, using herbs, spices, flavored vinegars, salsas, and olive oil to flavor food. Choose low- or reduced-sodium versions of condiments



This diet plan can also help with weight maintenance; talk with your doctor if you are interested in losing weight.

Check with a dietitian or doctor for your specific dietary needs.

*Additional Notes:*

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