



What You Can Do to Lower Your Blood Pressure

According to health experts, there are several key approaches you can take to manage your blood pressure. That's because genetic, lifestyle, and health factors all contribute to an individual's blood pressure levels. When attempting to manage or lower your blood pressure, results will vary from person to person, and it may take time, patience, and some experimenting to get it right. Read more below to learn which factors can contribute to high blood pressure, and what you can do to lower your levels for a healthier heart.

To monitor how these changes may affect your blood pressure, you can get an at-home blood pressure monitor and cuff so you can take your readings often and track your levels over time. As always, be sure to seek the advice of a physician before starting any new health routine, diet, or fitness plan.

Adopt a New Eating Plan

Eating a healthy diet is one of the most impactful ways you can lower your blood pressure. While there isn't a "magic ingredient" that can lead to lower blood pressure, studies have shown the effectiveness of the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan in lowering blood pressure over time. One such study found that dietary changes alone decreased systolic blood pressure (also known as the top number in your reading) by 6-11 mmHG. The DASH diet plan limits the intake of red meat, sodium, and sugar, which, when eaten in excess, can contribute to an increased risk of high blood pressure. The DASH diet focuses on lean proteins like chicken and fish, healthy fats from nuts and olive oil, and plenty of fresh or frozen veggies and fruit.



Want help creating a DASH eating plan or lifestyle that can work for you?

Consult with a Livongo expert coach today. Not a Livongo member? Check your eligibility [here](#) or read more about the DASH eating plan [here](#).

Eat Less Sodium

Decreasing your salt intake can be effective in lowering blood pressure, too. That's because when there is more salt in your bloodstream, it pulls water into your blood vessels. More water means more total volume of blood in your blood vessels, and more blood can mean higher blood pressure for some people. Salt sensitivity of blood pressure can occur often if you are older than 45 years, are African American, are a woman, or have metabolic syndrome.

Eating less sodium means more than holding the table salt, however. Sodium is hidden in things like packaged foods, canned foods, snacks, deli meat, and more. To limit your sodium intake, eat less of these types of foods. When cooking at home, avoid the table salt by **flavoring your foods** with vinegar, citrus juice, spices, and fresh or dried herbs. By making these changes, you may see a decrease in blood pressure in as little as 2 weeks.



Need more help finding the hidden sodium in your foods?

Check out [this article](#) on 10 surprising salt sources.

Up Your Activity

Physical activity is another key way that you can help lower your blood pressure. This is because aerobic exercise, which includes low-impact activities such as walking, can help reduce vascular resistance. Vascular resistance is the resistance that your heart must overcome to push blood through the circulatory system and create blood flow. For those who have high blood pressure despite taking multiple blood pressure medications — a condition known as resistant hypertension — physical activity may help lower blood pressure over several weeks. You can read more about resistant hypertension below. For people who are not normally physically active, even 5-10 minutes a day can make a difference. The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of activity on most days.



Need ideas for activities?

Check out these [4-week plans for cardio and strength training](#). As always, make sure you consult with your doctor before starting any new exercise programs.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Excess weight, and in particular, excess fat cells in the body, can lead to high blood pressure. Scientific evidence suggests this is because carrying excess body fat stimulates the brain in such a way that increases blood pressure. The great news is that just a small amount of weight loss can lower your blood pressure. Even 5-10 pounds can be enough to have an impact. In the long term, you should focus on maintaining a healthy weight that takes into consideration your body type and height. Talk to your doctor about what your healthy weight range might be.



Need help setting a weight-loss goal?

First, talk to your doctor. Then, consult [this guide](#) for how to create a weight-loss goal that works for you. If you ever need some extra motivation or support, you can always contact your Livongo expert coach for help and inspiration.

Stop Smoking

Every time you smoke, the nicotine present in cigarettes stimulates the brain and causes a temporary increase in blood pressure. Over time, smoking can also increase the buildup of plaque inside the arteries, which puts extra strain on the heart and could lead to a heart attack or stroke. Quitting smoking is an important step in overall heart health, including managing blood pressure. If you need even more reason to quit, exposure to secondhand smoke can have the same negative effects on the body, meaning your loved ones could be at risk, too. Improve your health and the health of your loved ones by quitting.



It's never too late to quit smoking.

If you quit smoking now, your risk for heart disease and stroke will drop. Consult these links for [tools](#) and [tips](#) to stop smoking.





Manage Stress

Did you know stress releases hormones in the body that cause your heart to work harder and beat faster, and cause your blood vessels to constrict? These effects are temporary, but over time, chronic stress can keep your body in this heightened state for days or even weeks. This puts unnecessary strain on your heart. Stress can also contribute to other risk factors for high blood pressure, like smoking, excessive drinking, poor dietary choices, disrupted sleep, and more.

To stress less, it's important to learn about what causes you stress and why. Working through difficult emotions through daily journaling or therapy can often help relieve stress. If you can, take 15-20 minutes a day to focus on your breathing. Deep breathing is a great tool for communicating to our nervous system that there's no reason to be stressed.



Need help coping with stress?

You can read more about coping with stress [here](#).

Moderate Your Alcohol

Studies have shown an association between high alcohol consumption and high blood pressure, though the mechanism by which alcohol raises blood pressure in the body is still relatively unknown. Researchers have found that reducing alcohol intake can help lower blood pressure, especially in those who consume two or more drinks per day.

While there have been some studies that show a beneficial link between alcohol consumption and blood pressure, alcohol has been known to do more harm than good in higher quantities. Experts note that moderate alcohol intake is ideal. For men, two drinks or less per day is the recommended quantity. For women, one drink or less per day is considered moderate.



Feel like having a drink but don't want the added alcohol?

Consider a mocktail. These [three mocktail recipes](#) can feel as special as a cocktail, without all the sugar and alcohol content.

Take All Medications as Prescribed

If you're managing blood pressure, your doctor may prescribe one or more medications to help. Here are the different kinds of medications you might expect your doctor to prescribe, and what they do:

1. Diuretics rid the body of excess sodium (salt) and water and help control blood pressure. These are sometimes called "water pills."
2. ACE inhibitors, ARBs, and calcium channel blockers relax and open up the narrowed blood vessels and lower blood pressure.

It is important that if you are prescribed medications, you take them as directed and continue to monitor your blood pressure over time for changes. Medications may be very effective for managing blood pressure, but it may take time for you and your doctor to find the right dosage and schedule. If you don't see any changes in your blood pressure over time, be sure to talk to your doctor. An at-home blood pressure monitor can help you track your blood pressure, so you can notice trends.



Do you have a hard time remembering to take your medication every day?

Here are some [tips](#) that can help you remember.

Understanding Resistant Hypertension

It's important to remember that making significant lifestyle changes may not impact blood pressure immediately, and it may take weeks or months to find the right combination of changes that will have the greatest impact on your health. The best way to understand which changes have the most impact for you is to monitor your blood pressure regularly over time to track your trends. However, if you've made long-term lifestyle changes like those recommended above, are taking multiple medications, and have yet to see any changes in your blood pressure, you may have something known as resistant hypertension. This kind of hypertension is hard to treat and may have a secondary cause. If you think you may have resistant hypertension, be sure to speak with your doctor.

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