



Hypertension Medications

If you have high blood pressure (also called hypertension), you may need to take medication to help lower it. People with hypertension who take these medications every day are much less likely to have a heart attack or stroke.

Your medications work best when you take them as prescribed and also make healthy lifestyle choices.

What is hypertension?

Hypertension means having higher than normal blood pressure levels. Blood pressure controls:

- The force of your blood on the walls of your blood vessels.
- The rate that the blood is pumped throughout your body.

Everyone needs a certain amount of blood pressure to make this process possible. When the force of blood against your artery walls is too strong, you have hypertension.

Having hypertension causes your heart to work too hard to move blood throughout your body. By lowering your blood pressure, you can help reduce the pressure on your heart and blood vessels.

There are 2 numbers in a blood pressure measurement. Both numbers are important.

If you are:	Your blood pressure target is:	What you can do:
An adult 18 to 59 years old	139/89 or below.	• Take medications as directed.
A person with diabetes	Talk with your doctor about your specific blood pressure goal as it may be lower.	• Eat less sodium (salt).
A person with certain types of kidney problems		• Avoid drinking alcohol in excess.
An adult 60 years of age or older without diabetes and without certain types of kidney problems	139/89 or below.	

In a blood pressure reading, such as 139/89:

- The top number (139) is the “systolic” pressure, which is the force of blood against your arteries when your heart is sending blood to your body.
- The lower number (89) is the “diastolic” pressure, which is the force of blood against your arteries while your heart relaxes between beats.

Who needs to take blood pressure medications?

Your doctor will probably suggest medications if your blood pressure is above the target, which varies depending on your age and health. See the table above to find your target blood pressure.

What are the most common hypertension medications and how do they work?

Hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ) and **chlorthalidone** are examples of diuretics. Diuretics work in the kidneys by helping your body get rid of extra water and sodium through urine. Having extra fluid can contribute to high blood pressure.

Lisinopril is an example of an ACE inhibitor. These work by causing the blood vessels to relax and widen. This increases the supply of blood and oxygen to the organs (heart, brain, and kidneys) and helps the heart beat more easily.



This medication can be especially helpful for people who have other conditions that affect blood vessels (such as diabetes, kidney problems, heart disease, heart failure, or past stroke).

Lisinopril-hydrochlorothiazide contains both HCTZ (a diuretic) and lisinopril (an ACE inhibitor), so it gives you the benefit of both of these medications. Because most people with high blood pressure need to take 2 or more medications to control their blood pressure, this drug is an easier and less costly way to get 2 medications in one pill. If you take a diuretic and an ACE inhibitor, ask your doctor if you can switch to this medication.

Amlodipine is an example of a calcium channel blocker. It relaxes the muscles around your arteries, which makes it easier for your heart to pump blood.

How do lifestyle choices affect my medications?

Making healthy lifestyle choices can help lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk of heart disease. These choices also increase the effectiveness of your medication.

The most important lifestyle choices you can make are to:

- Lose weight. If you're overweight, losing 5 to 10 percent of your body weight may be the best way to lower your blood pressure. For example, if you weigh 250 pounds, try to lose 13 to 25 pounds.
- Get regular physical activity (aim for 30 minutes most days of the week).
- Stay smoke-free or quit, if you smoke.
- Eat foods low in sodium (salt) and don't add salt.
- Stop or limit alcohol use.

How long will I need to take blood pressure medication?

Most people take blood pressure medication for many years, and sometimes for the rest of their lives. These medications lower blood pressure and reduce the chance of having a heart attack or stroke, or of developing heart disease.

What should I do if I have side effects?

The risks and severity of side effects are very low compared with the risks of having a heart attack or stroke if you don't take blood pressure medication.

Talk with your doctor about any side effects. This way, they can choose the best medication and dose for you. Be sure to also tell your doctor if you can't take any medication they prescribe.

How can I remember to take my medications?

Here are some tips:

- Download the My KP Meds app to get medication reminders on your phone.
- Use a pillbox that has 7 sections, one for each day of the week.
- Set up a daily routine for taking your medications, such as at bedtime, mealtime, or at the start of a daily TV show.
- Make a simple chart. Post it in a place where you'll see it every day, like on the mirror in the bathroom.
- Set an alarm clock or watch as a reminder.
- Record your medications on a wallet card or calendar.

Are there any special instructions I need to be aware of?

Yes. It's important to keep track of your medications.

- Download the My KP Meds app.
- Carry a medication record card (wallet card) with you and keep it up to date. Write down the medications you're taking. Also list any drug or food allergies you have and any over-the-counter (OTC) medications, herbs, or supplements you're taking.
- Review your medication card with your doctor or other medical professionals you see, including your dentist.
- Ask the pharmacist to check for possible drug interactions with other prescription or OTC medications you're taking.
- Refill your medications at least 1 to 2 weeks before you run out.
- Carry some kind of medical identification, like a Medic Alert bracelet, if recommended by your doctor. For more information, call 1-888-633-4298, or go to MedicAlert.org.

Additional resources

For information, tools, classes, and other resources:

- Search kp.org/mydoctor
- Contact your local Health Education Department

If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

HEALTH EDUCATION

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.

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