



# High Blood Pressure? Here's What You Can Do

## What is high blood pressure?

Having high blood pressure (hypertension) means your heart has to work harder than normal to move blood through your body. As your heart pumps blood into your blood vessels, the flow creates pressure against the vessel walls. If this pressure is consistently higher than normal, you have high blood pressure.

Most people with high blood pressure don't feel symptoms. But it increases your risks for stroke, heart attack, and kidney disease.

You can help lower your blood pressure and avoid these risks.

## How do I check my blood pressure, and what do the numbers mean?

When your blood pressure is checked, the results are listed as 2 numbers, for example 139/89. The top number is systolic pressure. It's the pressure inside your blood vessels when your heart beats and pumps blood. The bottom number is diastolic pressure. It's the pressure when your heart is relaxed between beats. Both numbers are important.

Blood Pressure Goal		
Office measurement	Below or equal to 139/89	For some people based on their health or age, a lower goal may be appropriate. Please discuss your specific blood pressure goal with your doctor.
Home measurement	Below or equal to 134/84	

We encourage you to:

- Talk with your doctor or other clinician about your blood pressure goal. Please ask about your 10-year cardiovascular disease risk. Your doctor can help you understand your overall heart health.
- Check your blood pressure (BP) regularly at home and write down the results. Share your blood pressure values with your doctor. Blood pressure monitors with an upper arm cuff are best. You can buy a home BP cuff at many stores and online. Kaiser Permanente pharmacies stock the Omron 3 Upper Arm Monitor.

## What causes high blood pressure?

Several lifestyle and genetic factors can contribute to high blood pressure, including:

- Getting too little exercise or other physical activity.
- Having a family history of high blood pressure.
- Drinking too much alcohol.
- Eating too much salt (sodium).
- Smoking (tobacco or cannabis).
- Ongoing high stress.
- Having untreated sleep apnea.

## What can you do to lower your blood pressure?

We encourage you to start with one of the healthy changes listed below. Choose a change that's important to you and realistic for your daily life. For example, eat more fresh vegetables and fruits or take 30-minute walks several times a week. When your first change becomes a habit, choose what to do next.

**Quit smoking** (if you smoke). This is the single most important change you can make to improve your health and feel better.

**Enjoy physical activity** or exercise for 30 minutes or more, most days of the week. This also helps reduce stress.

**Eat healthy.** Enjoy more fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans.

**Maintain your weight or lose weight** by eating smaller portions and avoiding high-fat, high-salt, and “fast” foods. Limit your total salt (sodium) use to 1 teaspoon a day (2,300 mg).

**Manage your stress and get enough sleep.** Choose a stress-reducing activity that you'll enjoy, such as walking, dancing, tai chi, yoga, or meditation. If you have difficulty getting enough sleep, talk with your doctor about support for improving sleep.

**Limit alcohol.** For women, this means no more than 1 drink per day. For men, no more than 2 drinks.

**Take medications if prescribed by your doctor** if you have hypertension. It's important to take your medications exactly as directed.

If you'd like support making lifestyle changes, our wellness coaches can help. Call 866-251-4514 to schedule a phone appointment with a wellness coach.

## Additional resources

For more health information, tools, classes, and other resources:

- Search [kp.org/mydoctor](https://kp.org/mydoctor)
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Department

For instructions on how to measure your blood pressure at home, use this tip sheet and video:

- [How to Take Blood Pressure Measurements at Home](#)
- [Tips for Taking Your Blood Pressure at Home](#)

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 medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need additional information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.

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