

## Managing High Blood Pressure: What You Can Do

High blood pressure. High blood pressure is sometimes called “the silent killer” because it does not cause symptoms unless it is very high, and it can damage blood vessels without a person knowing it. For some people, the first symptom is a heart attack or stroke. High blood pressure can be dangerous because it makes the heart work too hard and can damage your body’s blood vessels.

Doctors call high blood pressure “hypertension.” In hypertension, blood pressure remains above 140/90 over time. If a person’s blood pressure is between 120/80 and 139/89, then they have “prehypertension.” This means that they don’t have high blood pressure now but are likely to develop it in the future, particularly if they don’t make healthy lifestyle changes. At a regular office visit, your doctor can check your blood pressure and tell you if you have high blood pressure or if you are at risk for developing it.

If you have high blood pressure, you’re not alone. Most people will develop the condition during their lifetime. Fortunately, there are many things you can do, and if needed, your doctor can prescribe medications that control hypertension. But how do you know if your medications are effective if you can’t feel them working? And are they safe to take long-term? What else can you do to stay healthy?

You and your doctor can work out the best way to prevent or treat hypertension. As a team, you will decide what your goal blood pressure should be, how long you’ll need to reach it, whether you’ll need medications, and how to work in lifestyle changes that will help you stay healthy. A LifeSteps Health Coach can also help answer your questions and support you in communicating with your doctor and following your doctor’s recommendations. A Health Coach is a specially trained healthcare professional, such as a nurse, respiratory therapist, or dietitian available at no charge to you, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. To talk to a Health Coach, call 1-877-LIFE-123 (1-877-543-3123).

Whether you have high blood pressure or not, the following steps can go far to reduce your blood pressure and help you live a long, healthy life.

- **Losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight.** Losing as few as 10 pounds can lower your blood pressure, and a healthy weight reduces your heart disease risk.
- **Exercising.** Thirty minutes a day of moderate exercise like walking lowers blood pressure and helps prevent heart disease.
- **Eating well.** A diet high in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy and low in saturated fat -- called the DASH eating plan -- can lower blood pressure. Reducing the salt (sodium) in your diet can also help lower blood pressure.
- **Taking medications.** Diuretics, beta-blockers, and ACE inhibitors are a few of the types of medications your doctor may prescribe if lifestyle changes don’t lower your blood pressure enough.

To get more details on how to manage high blood pressure, talk to your healthcare provider or call a LifeSteps Health Coach 1-877-LIFE-123 (1-877-543-3123). You can also get more information online at LifeSteps Online.