Understanding High Blood Pressure

Lake County Factsheet #FCSH2003

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What is high blood pressure?

It is when the force of your blood moving through your body's blood vessels is frequently too high.

What do the numbers mean?

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic (upper number) The pressure in your arteries when your heart beats	Diastolic (lower number) The pressure in your arteries when your heart rests
Normal	Less then 120	Less then 80
Elevated	120-129	Less then 80
High Blood Pressure Stage 1	130-139	80-89
High Blood Pressure Stage 2	140 or higher	90 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis (seek medical attention)	Higher then 180	Higher then 120

Source: https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/understanding-blood-pressure-readings

What are the consequences of high blood pressure?

Not controlling blood pressure can lead to other series health issues. It can affect your brain by causing a stroke or damage the blood vessels in your eyes and affect your vision. Your arteries in your heart can narrow and put you at risk for a heart attack or worse not supply enough blood to your body which can result in heart failure. The damage can go deeper into the body, affecting the kidneys and their ability to filter blood and function effectively for health.

What can I do to prevent or manage high blood pressure?

There are several steps you can take starting with knowing your numbers. This can be done by your health care provider or at home. If taking it at home, check with your provider on the best device and cuff size to ensure an accurate reading. When taking your pressure, place the bottom of the cuff above the elbow bend and ensure you are sitting with your feet flat on the floor and your back straight. Make sure to avoid smoking, exercise, alcohol, and caffeinated beverages 30 minutes before taking the reading. To help identify trends or patterns in your health, record your readings in a journal noting the day and time the reading was taken. Changes in the foods you choose daily are another step you can take. Choose variety and color by eating the rainbow of fruits and vegetables. Be sure to add them to your plate first, filling at least half your plate with them. Shopping the perimeter of the grocery store will let you focus on fresh foods, lower in fat and sodium. Packaged, processed and ready-prepared foods offer convenience but are not always the healthiest choice. When selecting those foods, read the food label for a few minutes. Choosing foods with 5 grams of fat or less is considered low-fat. Aiming for lower-fat foods will also provide you with foods lower in saturated fat. Too high of saturated fats in your diet can put you at risk for heart disease. Be sure to check out the sodium in the packaged food you are selecting, consuming no more than 2,300 mg a day, ideally staying under 1,500 mg a day is best for optimal health. When cooking, focus on using healthier oils such as olive and canola oil which contain healthier fats. One diet plan recommended to manage and prevent high blood pressure is following the DASH Diet which incorporates many of the suggestions above. In addition, choose whole grains, low-fat and fat-free dairy, fish, poultry, beans, and nuts. When choosing beverages focus on hydration and nutrient-rich, skip super-sweetened beverages. For DASH friendly recipes visit https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/dash-eating-plan

Balancing what you eat with adequate physical activity is key to preventing and managing chronic diseases. It's recommended adults aim for at least 150 minutes a week. Increase your intensity and length of activity over time to reach the health goals that are best for you.

Source: American Heart Association: http://heart.org

Additional Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/about.htm
National Institute on Aging:
https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/high-blood-pressure-and-older-adults