

For Immediate Release

Preventing High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the United States. If your blood pressure stays higher than 130/80 mm Hg for a period of time, it can cause serious health problems such as heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and dementia.

According to the National Heart, Lung and Blood (NHLB) Institute, a healthy lifestyle is important in preventing and managing high blood pressure. Modifications include weight reduction/healthy weight maintenance, a healthy eating plan, increasing physical activity, dietary sodium reduction, limiting alcohol consumption, getting enough sleep, reducing stress and quitting smoking. Here are a few tips:

Move More. Regular moderate physical activity such as walking briskly for 30 minutes on most days of the week can help lower and control blood pressure. If you have not been active for quite some time or if you are beginning a new activity or exercise program, take it gradually. Consult your healthcare professional if you have cardiovascular disease or any other preexisting condition.

Aim for a healthy weight. Walking may help with maintaining a healthy body weight (body mass index of 18.5–24.9), which decreases the risk of hypertension. In excess fat tissue the increased blood vessels put a burden on the heart. Even a small weight loss of ten pounds can reduce blood pressure or prevent hypertension in many overweight people.

Follow a healthy eating plan. Blood pressure can be lowered 8-14 mm Hg by following the eating plan, Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH). Following the DASH diet increases intake of the following nutrients: potassium, magnesium, fiber, and calcium, all of which have been linked to lowering blood pressure.

The DASH diet includes eating more fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy, and less saturated fat and total fats. The DASH diet combined with regular moderate exercise and a healthy weight provides the best reduction of blood pressure. Limiting sodium and alcohol intake can also lower blood pressure 2-8 mm Hg². If you already have high blood pressure, it is important to prevent it from getting worse or causing complications. You should get regular medical care and follow your prescribed treatment plan.

Submitted by Brenda Aufdenkamp, UNL Extension Educator, Lincoln County

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