

Lower Your Blood Pressure, Raise Your Health

Packet 1 — Basics

For everyday tips on managing high blood pressure, read these handouts and talk with your health team at L.A. Health Services.*

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* These handouts are for information only. They are not medical advice, and do not replace advice given by your doctor.



UCLA

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Understanding High Blood Pressure

Why should I care about high blood pressure?

Your blood vessels carry blood and nutrients through your body, like pipes carrying water to parts of a house. Too much pressure or strain on blood vessels is called high blood pressure or “hypertension.”

Lowering blood pressure may help you prevent serious health problems including:



HEART ATTACK

a block in blood flow to the heart



STROKE OR WORSENING BRAIN HEALTH

a block in blood flow to the brain



KIDNEY DAMAGE

harm to the body part that cleans blood



BLINDNESS



BLOOD VESSEL DAMAGE

for example, damage to leg blood vessels that causes limited and painful walking, called “peripheral arterial disease”



SEXUAL FUNCTION PROBLEMS

High blood pressure is common and nothing to be ashamed of. While it does not have a cure and is often for life, there are many ways to control your blood pressure.

How common is high blood pressure in Black / African American communities?

Nearly 1 out of 2 people who identify as Black or African American in the U.S. have high blood pressure. It may be more or less common in different communities, like different country ancestry. Fortunately, there are many ways to lower blood pressure!

Is my blood pressure high?

Measuring your blood pressure is the only way to know if your blood pressure is high. Read *Measuring My Blood Pressure*, pg. 4.



REMEMBER

High blood pressure usually has no signs or symptoms!

Even when blood pressure is high, most people feel completely normal. Extremely high blood pressure may cause headaches, chest pain, dizziness, trouble breathing, nausea, or vomiting, blurred eyesight, or stress.

How do I control high blood pressure?

Most people need healthy daily habits and medicines to lower blood pressure. Learn more by talking with your doctor. Read *Action Plan*, pg. 6 and *Packet 2: Medicines*.

What can cause high blood pressure?

- Daily habits, like nutrition
- Family history of high blood pressure
- Medical conditions like kidney disease
- Medical conditions as we get older.
Though, many young people also have high blood pressure!
- For many people, the cause is unknown.

Why is high blood pressure more common in certain communities, and how do we overcome this together?

The strength and richness of diverse cultures and communities – such as traditional foods, active lifestyles, shared health goals, and more – can help many people better manage their blood pressure. Talk to your healthcare team about ways to include your culture in blood pressure management.

Some communities, such as some racial and ethnic groups, may have less access to healthy resources for controlling blood pressure. This can make it harder to find healthcare, healthy foods, and safe places to exercise. These are some examples of how “systemic racism” can have health-damaging effects. Talk with your healthcare team about services that can support affected communities.

References:

1. Aggarwal R, et al. Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Hypertension... Hypertension. 2021.
2. Whelton PK, et al. 2017 ACC/AHA Guideline for ... high blood pressure in adults.. J Am Coll Cardiol. 2018.

What if everyday life makes it hard to lower my blood pressure?

Many parts of life make it hard to focus on high blood pressure. You are not alone in this.

Ask your healthcare team to make an appointment with the DHS Behavioral Health Team. They will guide you through free or low-cost resources (like transportation, healthy food, housing, mental wellness, and more).



**L.A. HEALTH SERVICES TEAM
IS HERE FOR YOU!**

Contact L.A. Health Services:

www.dhs.lacounty.gov
or call 844-804-0055

Look up local centers and resources:

www.1degree.org
www.findhelp.org

For free legal services

**(help with evictions, immigration,
domestic violence, and more)**

write to legalhelp@dhs.lacounty.gov
or call 818-485-0575

For benefits and application support (CalFresh foods, EBT, Medi-Cal or Medicaid insurance, and more)

www.benefitscal.com
or call CBEST (866-613-3777)

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Tips for Measuring My Blood Pressure

Your healthcare team may ask you to measure your own blood pressure. This is an important way to know if your blood pressure is high in your everyday life. Tell your blood pressure numbers to your doctor, so they can better help with your blood pressure.

How can I check my blood pressure?

- Ask your healthcare team if they can help you get your own blood pressure monitor.
- Schedule a nurse visit. If you take blood pressure medicines, take them before the visit.
- If you buy a monitor, get one with an “upper arm” wrap or cuff. Find accurate monitors on www.validatebp.org/.

SYSTOLIC BLOOD
PRESSURE NUMBER

SYS
mmHg

130

DIASTOLIC BLOOD
PRESSURE NUMBER

DIA
mmHg

80

HEART RATE

PULSE
/min

75



Learning to use a blood pressure monitor correctly takes time. Use these tips to get a correct measurement!



DO

- Measure your blood pressure in the morning before eating and drinking
- Use the bathroom (if needed)
- Sit and relax for 5 minutes
- Place feet flat on the ground
- Place the bottom of the blood pressure wrap, or cuff, just above your elbow
- Rest your arm at the height of your chest (for example, on top of a table)
- Write down your numbers and share with your doctor.



DO NOT

- At least 30 minutes before:
 - Do not have caffeine (coffee, tea, energy drinks)
 - Do not exercise
 - Do not smoke
- Do not talk while measuring it.



A healthy blood pressure is usually below 130 / 80 mmHg. Top number (130) is systolic blood pressure. Bottom number (80) is diastolic blood pressure.

See your doctor urgently if

your blood pressure is higher than 180 / 120 mmHg.

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if

your blood pressure is higher than 180 / 120 mmHg **AND** you have symptoms of dangerously high blood pressure (headache, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, blurry vision.)



How should I keep track of my blood pressure?



Instructions: Use this table to record your blood pressure. Bring the numbers to your next appointment or send them to your healthcare team in a patient portal message.

Ask your healthcare team about:

- My blood pressure goal is _____ mmHg.
- I should check my blood pressure _____ times each week.
- My next appointment for blood pressure is on this date _____.

Date	Time when blood pressure measured	Top blood pressure number <i>called systolic blood pressure</i>	Bottom blood pressure number <i>called diastolic blood pressure</i>	Heart rate <i>called pulse</i>	Notes
example	9am	130	80	75	Drank coffee before measuring

My Action Plan: Controlling Blood Pressure



Instructions: In the next pages are **6** proven daily habits to lower your blood pressure.

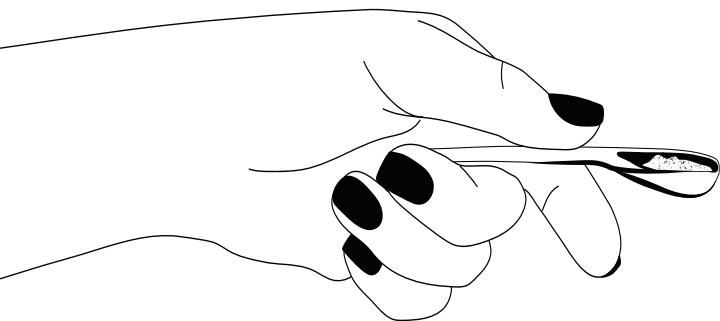
Try 1 daily habit for at least 1 month. Then over time add in more habits. Most people need healthy habits and medicine to lower blood pressure.

NAME: _____

Small changes can create big health improvements! Improving daily habits takes time and patience. Ask family or friends to try new habits with you!

1. Eat less salt or *sodium*

Why? Eating less salt helps lower your blood pressure and heart stress. On food labels, salt is called “sodium.” Aim for less than one teaspoon of salt daily from all foods and drinks (or less than 1,500 mg of sodium daily).



*Lowers blood pressure by average of 5 to 6 points**

When shopping:

- ☐ Read food labels. Choose foods with no sodium or low sodium.
- ☐ Limit foods with lots of salt (packaged or prepared foods, bread, cheese, sandwiches, pizza, burritos, chips, premade soups, instant noodles).

When cooking:

- ☐ Instead of salt, use herbs and spices for flavor (like lemon, garlic, onion, vinegar, chili), low-salt sauces including hot sauces, or salt-free seasoning mixes. Limit high-salt seasonings (chicken bouillon, MSG).
- ☐ Cook with little or no salt, even if cooking for others. Keep a saltshaker at the table for family and friends.
- ☐ Try heart-healthy recipes from healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov.

Search online for “Heart Healthy Home Cooking, African American Style” and “Soul Food Makeover – Heart Healthy African American Recipes”

When eating out:

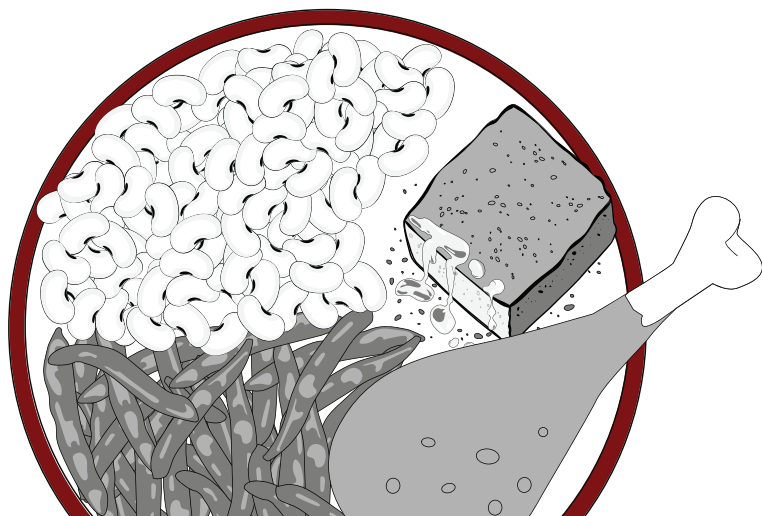
- ☐ Limit fast food. Prepare or freeze meals ahead of time.
- ☐ Ask restaurants to use less salt or no salt. Order sauces or dressings on the side and use less of them.

* points = units of millimeters of Mercury (mmHg), which is how blood pressure is measured.

2. Eat healthy foods for your blood pressure

Why? Eat foods naturally high in nutrients, such as fiber, protein, and vitamins, to improve your blood pressure and heart health. Called “DASH” foods, or Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension.

*Lowers blood pressure by average of 5 to 12 points**



- ☐ Eat at least 1 fruit and 1 vegetable with each meal (broccoli, okra, sweet potato, avocado, apple).
- ☐ Eat whole or brown grains instead of white grains (brown rice, whole grain bread, whole wheat noodles, whole wheat tortillas).
- ☐ Eat low-fat protein (chicken, fish, turkey, beans, lentils, eggs). Limit high-fat meats (beef, pork, lamb) and meats with high salt (deli meats, canned or smoked meats).
- ☐ Eat fat-free, reduced-fat, or low-fat dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese) instead of full-fat or whole milk dairy.
- ☐ Eat nuts and seeds daily.
- ☐ Limit foods and drinks with high sugar, salt, and fat (juices, sodas, desserts, fried foods).

3. Take your blood pressure medicines as prescribed

Why? Most people need two or more medicines to lower blood pressure. If you have been prescribed blood pressure medicines, taking them daily is a reliable way to lower blood pressure. These medicines help your body get rid of water, lower strain on your heart, or relax blood vessels. Two or more medicines often lower blood pressure more than one medicine alone.

1 medicine lowers blood pressure by average of 3 to 10 points

*2 or more medicines lower blood pressure by average 5 to 20 points**

- ☐ Ask your healthcare team for *Packet 2: Medicines* for practical tips on medicines. Some tips include using a pillbox or setting daily medicine reminders.
- ☐ If you have trouble taking medicines, contact your doctor's office. Please do not change or stop taking medicines on your own.

* points = units of millimeters of Mercury (mmHg), which is how blood pressure is measured.

4. Stay active and keep moving

Why? Regular exercise makes your heart stronger and lowers blood pressure. Aim for 2-3 hours or more of physical activity each week.

*Lowers blood pressure by average of 5 to 10 points**



- ☐ Try a fun activity for 30 minutes with family or friends (fast walk, dance to your favorite music, Zumba, gardening, swim, yoga).
- ☐ Make daily life more active (take stairs instead of elevators, march in place when watching TV, do chair exercises, track your steps, or bike).
- ☐ Try a free or low-cost exercise class at your local park, pool, or library.

5. Aim to keep a healthy weight

Why? Extra weight can make the heart work harder and raise blood pressure. Each person's goal weight is different.

*If extra weight is causing high blood pressure, every 5 pounds or about 2kg lost lowers blood pressure by average of 1 to 2 points**

- ☐ Ask your doctor if weight may be causing some of your high blood pressure.
- ☐ Ask your doctor about weight management programs and resources.

* points = units of millimeters of Mercury (mmHg), which is how blood pressure is measured.

6. Drink less alcohol

Why? Alcohol can raise blood pressure. If you drink alcohol, have no more than 1 drink for women and no more than 2 drinks for men in one day.

*Lowers blood pressure by average of 5 to 6 points**

- ☐ Drink 1 or 2 glasses of water after every alcoholic beverage.
- ☐ Commit with friends or family to 1 or 2 alcoholic drink limit at an event.

1 DRINK OF
ALCOHOL IS



5 oz OF WINE

or



12 oz OF BEER

or



1.5 oz OF HARD LIQUOR

like whiskey
or vodka

More daily habits that are good for your heart

Quit tobacco

Why? Stopping tobacco and cigarette use helps lower stress on your heart and body.

- ☐ Ask your healthcare team about medicines or support groups that can help you quit.

Get healthy sleep and rest

Why? Sleep and rest help the body stay balanced. Aim to get 7 or more hours daily.

- ☐ Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and night (coffee, caffeinated teas, energy drinks).
- ☐ Take away distractions from your sleeping space (bright lights, phone, TV).

Lower stress

Why? Stress can release hormones that raise blood pressure for a short time. Lowering stress can make it easier to have energy for healthy daily habits.

- ☐ Try a stress-relieving activity with family or friends daily (yoga, Tai Chi).
- ☐ Take a break. Rest, pray, or meditate for 10 to 20 minutes daily.
- ☐ If you have sadness or stress for more than a couple weeks, talk with your doctor. This is common, and what you tell your doctor is private. Or start by talking with family or friends.



For mental health resources, please contact your doctor's office.

References:

1. Group SR. A randomized trial of intensive versus standard blood-pressure control. *N Engl J Med*. 2015.
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4. Rainforth MV et. al. Stress reduction programs in patients with elevated blood pressure... *Curr. Hypertens. Rep*. 2007.
5. Whelton PK et. al. 2017 ACC/AHA Guideline for ... high blood pressure in adults. *J Am Coll Cardiol*. 2018.