

Healthy eating to lower high blood pressure

Having high blood pressure means that blood is pushing too hard against artery walls. This can damage your arteries over time and increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. Another term for high blood pressure is hypertension.

What dietary changes can help lower blood pressure?

Healthy eating can help lower your blood pressure and improve your overall health. Here are the most important dietary changes you can make.

Limit sodium intake

Most adults only need 1500 mg of sodium each day, but many eat much more than this. Aim to reduce your sodium intake to 2000 mg or less per day.

Although many foods contain sodium, most of the sodium we eat comes from processed foods. The main sources of sodium in the average Canadian diet include:

- Breads, crackers, muffins, cookies, desserts, granola bars
- Pizza, lasagna, prepared salads, frozen appetizers and entrees
- Deli meats, sausages, canned meats, chicken wings, burgers, meatballs
- Cheese, soups, sauces and condiments

To lower the amount of sodium you eat:

- Prepare your own meals often, using ingredients that have little to no added sodium
- Use the Nutrition Facts table to help you choose foods lower in sodium. The percent daily value (%DV) shows you if the food has a little or a lot of sodium. 5% DV or less is a little and 15% DV or more is a lot
- Flavour your food with fresh or dried herbs and spices, vinegar, lemon, lime, ginger, garlic and onion

- Make healthier choices when eating out. Restaurant food is often high in sodium. If available, check the nutrition information and choose foods with less sodium
- Use less salt at the table. All types of salt including kosher salt, sea salt, fleur de sel, smoked salt, and Himalayan salt are high in sodium

Increase potassium intake

While most Canadians eat too much sodium, many do not eat enough potassium. Foods rich in potassium include vegetables and fruits, milk, yogurt, beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds.

To increase the amount of potassium you eat:

- Fill half your plate with a variety of vegetables and fruits. Higher potassium choices include sweet potatoes, Swiss chard, spinach, avocados, bananas, peaches, oranges and kiwi
- Drink lower fat milk or soy beverage
- Add beans, peas or lentils to soups, salads, stews and casseroles
- Sprinkle pumpkin seeds or hemp hearts on yogurt or oatmeal

If you have kidney disease, or take medication to lower blood pressure, you may need to limit the amount of potassium you eat. Speak to your health care provider before you make changes to the way you eat.

Follow the DASH diet

DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. This kind of eating pattern:

- Is rich in vegetables, fruits and whole grains
- Includes lower fat dairy products, fish, poultry, nuts, seeds, beans, peas and lentils
- Is low in red meat and added sugars

The DASH diet is low in total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. It is high in potassium, calcium, magnesium and fibre.

For more information, including detailed eating plans, see Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure with DASH www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/new_dash.pdf (PDF 465KB).

Limit or avoid alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. According to Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health, no amount or kind of alcohol is good for your health. Alcohol increases the risk of many chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke and several cancers. If you drink alcohol, consider limiting to 1 to 2 drinks per week as a lower risk option. Speak with your health care provider to learn more.

What else can I do to lower my blood pressure?

If you have extra weight, losing even small amounts may help to lower your blood pressure.

For some people, changing the way they eat can result in small amounts of weight loss, or help to prevent or slow weight gain. Call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered dietitian about your healthy eating goals.

Your weight is not just a result of what you eat or how active you are. Many factors including genetics, medications, stress and sleep quality also influence your weight. Visit your health care provider to learn more. They can discuss treatment options and together you can decide the best approach to improve your overall health.

For more information

- Healthy eating guidelines for lower sodium eating: www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating-physical-activity/food-and-nutrition/sodium/healthy-eating-guidelines-lower-sodium