

Blood Pressure and Diabetes

If you have diabetes, you are at high risk for heart attack and stroke. Sometimes people with diabetes focus on getting their blood sugar under control and forget that controlling blood pressure and cholesterol are just as important. High blood pressure is also called hypertension. And sometimes it has no symptoms. But high blood pressure is very serious. It is one of the most important risk factors for heart attack, stroke and kidney failure for people with diabetes.

What is a high blood pressure?

An article on “Hypertension and Diabetes” in the October 2007 Diabetes Self Management describes high blood pressure as follows: “ the heart pumps blood through more than 93 miles of blood vessels, which act as a plumbing system, carrying blood to all the vital organs. A certain amount of pressure within this system is necessary to keep the blood moving, but too much pressure can damage the vessels and organs. If the heart pumps too hard or the body’s smaller blood vessels become too narrow, the pressure rises.” For people with diabetes, the goal for blood pressure control is to keep it **below 130/80 mm Hg.**

Treatment of High Blood Pressure

Lifestyle changes are central to improving blood pressure control. These include: losing weight, eating less salt, getting regular physical activity and adequate sleep. Sound familiar? These all help your diabetes, too! Decreasing stress, alcohol, caffeine and smoking will also lower blood pressure.

Medicine is often needed to **keep blood pressure below 130/80**. Sometimes people get frustrated when one medicine doesn’t do the trick. On average, it usually takes three or more medicines to control blood pressure. Many over-the-counter drugs including antacids, laxatives, pain relievers and cough medicine contain sodium. Check the label or ask your pharmacist!

Do I need to follow a low sodium diet?

Yes! Eating less salt will help lower your blood pressure. Eating more fruits and vegetables that are rich in magnesium and potassium, low fat dairy foods that are high in calcium, and avoiding foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol will help to lower blood pressure. This translates into a diet known as the DASH diet...**Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension**. If you have access to the internet, visit www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash for more information about the DASH diet including sample menus and recipes.

Where does the sodium come from?

The biggest single source of sodium in a person's diet comes from sodium chloride, better known as salt. Salt can be added to food at the table or by food processors before it reaches the store. Sodium is the main ingredient in salt, MSG, phosphates, nitrates and baking soda.

How much sodium?

If you are on a low sodium diet you should limit sodium to **less than 2000 mg per day**. That is the equivalent of 1 teaspoon of salt per day. Many people are told to follow a low salt diet. What exactly does that mean? Is everything off limits? The answer is no. You can think of it like a bank account....you get \$2000 a day (wishful thinking)....if you spend it all by noon, you have nothing left for later on. Look for the sodium on the nutrition labels of the foods that you buy- does it add up to more than what you have in the bank? Compare the sodium in some foods listed below:

Food	Raisin Bran	Oatmeal	American Cheese	Low fat Cheddar Cheese	Hungry Man Turkey Dinner	Homemade Baked Chicken, sweet potato and green beans
Amount	1 cup	1 cup	1 slice (1 ounce)	1 ounce	1	1
Sodium (mg)	354	2	406	176	1200	79

How can you lower your salt intake?

1. Take the salt shaker off the table, and do not use it. Try an herb blend such as Mrs. Dash.
2. Limit the amount of salt added to recipes. If you have always thrown a teaspoon of salt in the pasta or potato water slowly decrease the amount.
3. Read labels when grocery shopping to avoid foods high in sodium.
4. Avoid very high sodium foods including:
 - Monosodium glutamate (MSG) and soy sauce
 - Processed cheese and luncheon meats
 - Cured meats such as bacon, ham, sausage, corned beef
 - Salted crackers and chips
 - Canned soups, bouillon, broth
 - Pickles, olives, sauerkraut
 - Canned tuna fish
 - Regular V-8 and tomato juices
5. Limit processed foods, rice and coating mixes and most foods from fast food restaurants.
6. Cook from scratch whenever possible.

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