

# Blood Pressure Management and Heart Health

## What is Hypertension?

Blood pressure is the measurement of the force of blood against the walls of the arteries. High blood pressure, or hypertension, occurs when the heart pumps blood too forcefully throughout the body. This causes the arteries to stretch, which can cause them to become damaged and less elastic, potentially causing problems such as increasing a person's risk for having a heart attack or stroke. Therefore, maintaining blood pressure at a healthy level or reducing blood pressure if elevated can be essential to decreasing risks of developing these conditions. Because high blood pressure usually has no symptoms, it is called the "silent killer." **If you have high blood pressure, talk to your doctor about a goal for your blood pressure and steps to manage.**

## Risk Factors for High Blood Pressure

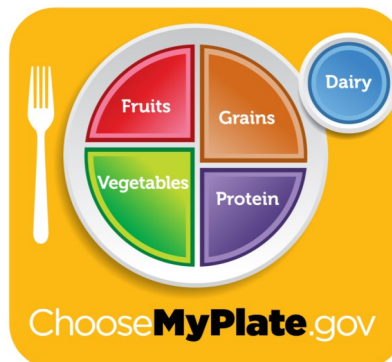
Certain risk factors are genetic while others can be lessened by making healthy lifestyle changes.

- Family history of high blood pressure
- Eating habits (low nutrition, higher salt intake)
- Maintaining weight outside of a healthy range for you
- Physical inactivity
- Drinking too much alcohol

## Tips to Maintain Healthy Blood Pressure or Reduce Blood Pressure

### 1. Make a Heart Healthy Plate:

- Include plenty of **colorful fruits and vegetables!** These are rich in potassium, which is important for maintaining healthy blood pressure.
- Include **heart-healthy fats** (i.e., walnuts, flax seeds)
- **Stay hydrated!** Your personal fluid needs vary based on many factors (weather, physical activity, health status); however, a general recommendation is 9 cups (**1 cup = 8 ounces**) of fluid per day for women and 13 cups for men. Fluid can come from juice, milk, coffee, and tea, but water is an excellent option!



- Choose **whole grains** for added fiber.
- Include calcium rich, **low-fat dairy**.
- Choose **lean protein**, including vegetarian protein (beans, tofu), and fatty fish (salmon, sardines, herring).

### 2. Reduce Salt Intake: Tips for Reducing Sodium

- For most people, reducing salt intake (sodium) can help manage blood pressure. Surprisingly, the majority of the salt we eat is found in processed foods (rather than added at the table).
- Choose plenty of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables and season them with herbs and spices yourself. Buy frozen vegetables without sauces, or no-salt added canned vegetables.
- Rinse canned foods, such as vegetables, to reduce salt.
- Choose fresh poultry, meat, and fish, rather than canned or processed (deli, cured meats, sausages).



### 3. Get Active! Tips for getting started:

- \*Increase physical activity slowly—start with 5-10 minutes a day. Gradually increase to 150 minutes total of moderate intensity activity per week.



- Make it work for you. This could be 30 minutes, 5 days a week, or 75 minutes, twice per week (150 minutes total) of brisk walking, swimming, or cycling.
- Divide your 30 minute workout into 3, 10 minute segments. Ex: walk 10 minutes on your lunch break and park 1-mile from work and walk to and from your car to the office/class.

*\*Consult with your doctor before beginning a physical activity routine.*

#### 4. Maintain a healthy weight for you.

Being overweight, which is often determined by medical professionals according to Body Mass Index (BMI) or waist circumference, is associated with increased risk of high blood pressure. However, for many people, placing too much emphasis on reducing the number on the scale, which may lead to “dieting,” can be troublesome, emotionally and psychologically. The good news is, if your weight is outside of healthy range for you, making health promoting changes such as increasing nutrition using MyPlate and becoming more physically active in ways you enjoy, may impact weight if it is outside of your natural range, or improve health regardless of any change in weight. In addition, eating when you are physically hungry, stopping when you are physically full, and eating foods that fuel your body in the amount it needs can improve health.

### Online Resources for Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Wellness

#### Nutrition Resources:

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/new\\_dash.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/new_dash.pdf)

The DASH Eating Plan, supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

The American Heart Association’s website, with information on how to lead a heart-healthy lifestyle. Click on “Nutrition Center” for specific information on heart-healthy grocery shopping, cooking, recipes, dining out, and more.

[www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov)

Personalized eating plans and interactive tools to help plan and assess food choices, based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

#### Physical Activity Resources:

[shapeup.org/fitness](http://shapeup.org/fitness)

Nutrition and physical activity information and tools to make daily goals for improvement.

[www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

The American Heart Association’s website. Click on “physical activity” for information on recommendations for heart health plus tips for how to incorporate physical activity into your day.

[www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/index.htm)

The website includes the Center’s for Disease Control and Prevention’s physical activity recommendations and includes examples of different types of activities.

#### Nutrition Counseling:

- Health Promotion Department, University Health Center 706-542-8690  
Offered to UGA Students only.
- Athens Regional 706-475-1000, opt. 2  
Offers nutrition counseling at a reasonable cost.
- St. Mary’s Nutrition Counseling 706-389-3669  
Offers nutrition counseling; accepts most insurance plans.

#### Physical Activity Resources in the Community:

- UGA Recreational Sports Ramsey Center 706-542-5060
- Gyms in Athens:
  - YMCA 706-543-6596
  - The Omni Club-Westside 706-369-3111
  - The Omni Club-Eastside 706-548-8346
- ACC Parks & Recreation 706-613-3800

References: 1. The American Heart Association’s Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations. American Heart Association website. [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org). 2. Water: How much should you drink everyday? MayoClinic website. Available at: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/water/art-20044256>. Accessed 1/26/2016.