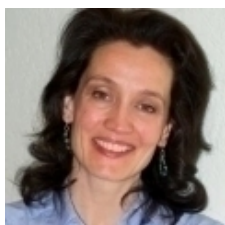


# Reduce high blood pressure through exercise, diet

By Mandy Kendall

In today's fast-paced world circumstances arise in most of our lives that have our stress levels rising, along with our blood pressure. Although occasional increases in blood pressure are not dangerous, it does become an issue when the pressure levels don't drop again.



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Unfortunately high blood pressure often has no detectable symptoms and can lead to an increased risk in serious health problems including heart attack and stroke; this is why this condition is often referred to as the "silent killer."

What is blood pressure? It refers to the amount of pressure exerted on the blood vessel walls as the heart pumps blood around the body. A blood pressure reading will have two numbers. The first (top or Systolic) number refers to the pressure in the blood vessels while the heart is beating. The second (bottom or Diastolic) number refers to the pressure while the heart is relaxing between beats.

What should my blood pressure be? The Mayo clinic offers the following guidelines:

Top number (systolic) in mm Hg		Bottom number (diastolic) in mm Hg	Your category*	What to do**
Below 120	and	Below 80	Normal blood pressure	Maintain or adopt a healthy lifestyle.
120-139	or	80-89	Prehypertension	Maintain or adopt a healthy lifestyle.
140-159	or	90-99	Stage 1 hypertension	Maintain or adopt a healthy lifestyle. If blood pressure goal isn't reached in about six months, talk to your doctor about taking one or more medications.
160 or more	or	100 or more	Stage 2 hypertension	Maintain or adopt a healthy lifestyle. Talk to your doctor about taking more than one medication.

Our lifestyles have a huge effect on our health and there are many things we can do to help prevent the onset of high HBP or to reduce it.

Here are some *Qwik-e* tips to help the fight against this silent killer:

1. **Cut down on salt.** No more than 2,300mg (a teaspoon) of salt is recommended per day per adult under 50 years of age with no more than 1,500 mg (just over half a teaspoon) being recommended for children and adults over 50. Just remember hidden salt (in processed foods like soups and convenience foods) can often give you much more than your daily allowance.

2. **Reduce your waistline.** Studies have shown that waist measurements are a better indicator (compared to weight or BMI) of risk factors for heart disease and other serious conditions. If waist measurements (measuring at the level of the belly button) are greater than 35 inches for women or 40 inches for men, it could indicate an increase in the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and HBP along with other metabolic problems. Even a loss of just 5 pounds can lower your blood pressure.

3. **Maintaining a healthy diet can help control HBP.** The Mayo Clinic recommends the "Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension" (DASH) diet, which promotes fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods along with plenty of potassium which can help prevent and control high blood pressure.

4. **Exercise.** Thirty minutes a day (even if it's just a brisk walk) can help lower your blood pressure.

5. **Limit alcohol.** Even if you have normal blood pressure alcohol will tend to increase pressure levels. The Mayo Clinic recommends limiting consumption to one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men. There is also, however, strong advice against saving-up personal quotas until the weekend for what is considered binge-type drinking as this can also strongly increase blood pressure levels.

6. **Stop smoking.** As well as causing damage to the whole body, smoking speeds up the process of hardening of the arteries, which in turn can increase the risk and dangers of HBP.

7. **Reduce stress.** Stress can be a huge contributor to HBP.

Relaxation techniques, meditation, deep breathing, anger management and plenty of sleep can go a long way to reducing risks of HBP. (Just saying “no” occasionally to that extra demand on your time and energy will also help too!)

**8. Monitor yourself.** Advances in modern technology now means blood pressure monitoring at home is possible. Even if these machines are not as highly accurate as clinic machines, taking readings at different times of the day and at regular intervals will allow you to chart patterns and changes in your pressure. Blood pressure readings taken in clinics can also often be affected by “white coat syndrome.” This is a phenomenon where patients, possibly due to nervousness, unwittingly exhibit higher blood pressure readings in a clinic setting than they would normally. This sometimes leads to an incorrect diagnosis, and monitoring pressure at home can be a useful comparison to lessen the chances of this happening.

**9. Symptoms not to be ignored.** Symptoms like frequent headaches, dizzy spells, disorientation, tightness in the chest, prolonged fatigue, irregular heartbeat or blurred vision should not be ignored as they could be an indication of HBP or other serious health conditions.

As will all things health-related, consult your doctor before making any changes to your lifestyle and health regime.

Until next time.

*Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe. If you have any questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and wellbeing topic, please feel free to drop me an email at [healthconnective@gmail.com](mailto:healthconnective@gmail.com), visit us on Facebook, or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.*

