

# Nutrition and Lifestyle Choices to Manage Blood Pressure

**Blood pressure** is the force of blood pushing against the walls of blood vessels.

**High blood pressure** (hypertension) means there is too much pressure in your blood vessels. This can damage your vessels, which increases your risk of a heart attack or stroke. Ask your healthcare provider what your blood pressure should be.

My target blood pressure: \_\_\_\_\_

## What can I do to lower my blood pressure?

The nutrition and lifestyle choices below can help you lower your blood pressure. Cross off the things you are already doing. If you're ready to make changes, check off one or more things you'd like to try.

### Nutrition choices:

- Choose and prepare foods with little or no added salt.
- Eat lots of vegetables and fruits.
- Choose whole grain foods every day.
- Eat more beans, peas, and lentils.
- Use heart healthy fats every day.
- Limit saturated fats.
- Enjoy fish at least 2 times a week.
- Eat foods with calcium every day.
- Limit the alcohol you drink.
- Limit caffeine.

### Lifestyle choices:

- Be active.
- If you smoke, quit.



This handout has some information about each of these choices.

## Nutrition choices

### Choose and prepare foods with little or no added salt (sodium)

- Choose fresh foods and foods with no salt added.
- Prepare food at home more often. Use low sodium ingredients.
- Eat less processed and packaged foods.
- Eat less restaurant, take out, and fast food.
- Eat less salty snacks.
- Use little or no salt in cooking and at the table.
- Try adding garlic, onion, herbs, spices, lemon juice, vinegar, or salt-free seasonings instead of salt to flavour your food.
- Read labels and compare packages to find foods lower in sodium. Look for foods that have a % Daily Value (DV) of 5% or less for sodium.
- All types of salts increase your blood pressure: table salt, sea salt, Himalayan salt, kosher salt.

### Eat lots of vegetables and fruits

Vegetables and fruits have potassium and fibre, which may help lower your blood pressure.

The tips below can help you fill half your plate with vegetables and fruit at meals and snacks.

- Have fruit at breakfast or for a morning snack.
- Add vegetables to wraps, sandwiches, and leftovers at lunch.
- Eat 2 different vegetables at supper.
- Add fruit to salads, yogurt, and cereal.
- Add vegetables to casseroles, chili, and sauces.
- Try different types of vegetables and fruit.



## Choose whole grain foods every day

- Read the ingredient lists on food packages. Look for the words 'whole grain' on packages of bread, cereal, crackers, pasta, and couscous.

Here's an example of an ingredient list on whole grain bread:



**Ingredients:** Whole grain whole wheat flour, water, yeast, sugar, vegetable oil, wheat gluten, salt, vinegar, calcium propionate, sorbic acid, monoglycerides.

- Try quinoa, barley, bulgur, or brown rice with your meals.

## Eat more beans, peas, and lentils

- Replace meat with cooked, dried beans, peas, or lentils at some of your meals.
- Add kidney beans, chickpeas, and lentils to soups, casseroles, salads, and spaghetti sauce.
- Try hummus with vegetables at a meal or snack.



## Use heart healthy fats every day

Heart healthy fats include:

- olive, canola, peanut, avocado, sunflower oil, or soft margarines
- ground flax, chia seeds, or hemp seeds; add to foods like yogurt, or hot cereal
- unsalted nuts



## Limit saturated fats

- Choose lean cuts of meat or skinless poultry.
- Avoid processed meats like hot dogs, bacon, sausage, and pepperoni.
- Replace butter or lard in cooking with heart healthy fats.



## Enjoy fish at least 2 times a week

- Eat fish higher in omega-3 fats like salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, trout, Arctic char, and tuna.
- Choose fresh, frozen, or no salt added canned fish.



## Eat foods with calcium every day

Try to have at least 2 servings of foods higher in calcium every day.

### Examples of foods higher in calcium:

- milk
- yogurt
- cheese
- fortified plant-based beverages (like soy, oat, or almond); read labels to find brands which have been fortified with calcium
- tofu made with calcium
- salmon or sardines, canned with bones



## Limit the alcohol you drink

Drinking less is better for your health.

Talk to your healthcare team if you have questions about alcohol and your health. For more information, visit [ccsa.ca](https://www.ccsa.ca).

## Limit caffeine

Caffeine is found in coffee and coffee-based drinks, tea, colas and other pop, and energy drinks.

Limit caffeine to no more than 400 mg a day. This is equal to 2–3 cups (8 ounces each) or 500–750 mL of coffee.

## Lifestyle choices

### Be active

Activity may help lower your blood pressure and improve your blood cholesterol. Activity also makes you stronger and may improve your quality of life.

- If you're not active now, check with your healthcare provider before you start being active. Start with a few minutes a day and increase your time slowly.
- Be active for at least 30–60 minutes, 4–7 days a week.
- Choose activities that make your heart beat faster:
  - brisk walking
  - swimming
  - bike riding
  - sports
  - running

You should breathe faster but still be able to talk.

- On at least 2 days a week, do activities to strengthen your muscles and bones:
  - heavy yard work
  - lifting weights
- Use a step counter (pedometer, smartwatch, or smartphone) to count your steps. Create daily step goals and review your progress to help you stay on track.
- If you're not sure what type and amount of physical activity is right for you, ask your healthcare provider.



### If you smoke, quit

Smoking can damage your heart and blood vessels. Nicotine also raises your blood pressure. One of the best ways to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke is to quit smoking.

For help quitting, talk to your healthcare provider, call 811 (Health Link), or visit [albertaquits.ca](https://albertaquits.ca).

## Learn ways to manage stress

Stress is associated with high blood pressure. If you are having a hard time managing stress, talk to your healthcare provider.

### Weight and blood pressure

If you have extra weight, losing even a small amount of weight may help lower your blood pressure.

If you are interested in learning more about your weight and blood pressure, talk to your healthcare provider.

### Next steps

This handout includes lifestyle choices that can help you manage your blood pressure. Change can be hard, especially if you try to make too many changes at once.

When you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, and break your goals into small steps. You're more likely to achieve smaller goals.

Ask your healthcare provider if you would like support with goal setting. To learn more, visit [ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts](https://ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts) and search "setting goals".

### For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811).
- Visit [ahs.ca/nutrition](https://ahs.ca/nutrition).
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta (<https://ab.211.ca/>) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.