



MASSAD OLINDE

Benefits Consulting

(225) 215-1010 • (866) 237-7723
info@massadolinde.com



May is **High Blood Pressure** Education Month.

Take the Pressure Off

Normal healthy blood pressure is under 120 systolic and under 80 diastolic. Elevated blood pressure (EBP) is 120 to 129 systolic and less than 80 diastolic. People with EBP are likely to develop high blood pressure unless they act to prevent it.

Untreated, a 20-point higher systolic or a 10-point higher diastolic number can double your risk of death from a heart attack or stroke.

High blood pressure numbers:

Stage 1 HBP is 130 to 139 systolic or 80 to 89 diastolic.

Stage 2 HBP is 140 systolic or higher or 90 diastolic or higher.

If you reach either stage, your health care provider will likely recommend lifestyle changes, maybe medication (depending on cardiovascular risks or family history), and regular follow-ups until your BP is controlled.

You have a 90% chance of developing HBP. This number has increased recently, partly because more Americans are overweight and living longer. Younger people are being impacted the most, as hypertension has tripled among adults under age 45.

If you are diagnosed with HBP, work with your provider to:

1. Learn how you can self-monitor your BP levels day to day. Get a home monitor approved by your provider, and learn the best times for checking your BP, and when not to check it (e.g., within 30 minutes of smoking, drinking coffee or exercising). Have your medical clinic check your home blood pressure monitor for accuracy. To learn more, search for blood pressure at home at heart.org.



2. Learn to control your BP with positive daily choices. Adopting a diet-and-lifestyle approach is the recommended first-line treatment for people with stage 1 hypertension who are at low risk for developing heart disease. What works: a diet high in fruits and vegetables (search for **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension** or DASH at www.nhlbi.nih.gov).



TLC for Your BP



High blood pressure silently damages blood vessels and leads to serious health problems, including stroke. In fact, it's the major risk factor for stroke. Reducing high blood pressure can help prevent stroke, a major cause of death and disability.

First, discuss your blood pressure with your health care provider.

If it's too high, or borderline high, work with your health care provider to lower it.

Taking prescribed medication, if needed, is important. However, the National Institutes of Health points out these lifestyle changes can go far to lower and control high blood pressure:

- **Research has shown the heart-healthy DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan**, rich in vegetables, fruits and whole grains and low in salt, can be as effective as medicines in lowering high blood pressure.
- **Regular physical activity can lower blood pressure.** (Get your provider's okay if you are new to exercise.)
- **Control stress.** Research shows techniques such as yoga and meditation can effectively soothe stress, lowering blood pressure in many people.
- **Get serious about weight control.** Even losing just 3% to 5% of excess weight can improve blood pressure readings.
- **If you smoke, get help quitting.** Call the National Cancer Institute's free Smoking quitline at **1-877-448-7848**.

Slash the Salt

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

When you hear the words salt and sodium, you may immediately think about the salt shaker on your table.

Maybe you use it before your meal to enhance the flavor of your food, or perhaps you add a dash while cooking. It may surprise you to learn that just 11% of your sodium intake comes from the salt you cook with or add at the table.

Most of the sodium Americans consume (71%) comes from ultra-processed, packaged and restaurant food. Salt is in pizza, bread, burgers, deli meat, chips, pretzels, pickles and condiments, to name a few. These foods are high in sodium because it's used in so many ways — to prevent spoilage, inhibit growth of pathogens, improve appearance and enhance flavor or texture.

If you've been told to cut back on salt for health reasons, such as salt-sensitive hypertension or kidney disease, it's not just about avoiding the salt shaker. Your best bet is to eat fewer ultra-processed foods.



You can still cook with salt, but try to cut back on using very salty sauces and dressings, such as soy or barbecue sauce. Instead, boost flavor with citrus fruits, such as lemon or lime; herbs, such as basil, oregano and rosemary; spices, such as cumin, cinnamon and coriander; or aromatics, including garlic, onion and ginger.

You don't need to banish salt from your diet, since at least 1,500 mg sodium per day is required for normal body functioning. The trouble is, many people get too much (about 3,400 mg per day).

Q: Home BP monitoring tips?

A: Home blood pressure monitors, widely available without a prescription, can determine your usual blood pressure in a relaxed setting. They're also valuable for checking the effectiveness of hypertension treatment and may reduce trips to your provider's office. Steps for proper monitoring include:

- Purchasing a monitor with an inflatable cuff correctly sized for your arm. Models come in either manually or automatically inflating styles.
- Initially, having the accuracy of your home monitor checked in your provider's office; recheck at least yearly.
- Sitting quietly for 5 minutes before checking your blood pressure. Make sure you're in a comfortable position with your back supported and arms and legs uncrossed.
- Using your monitor regularly about the same time twice a day. Your blood pressure is highest upon arising, so wait at least an hour before taking your first reading. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

