Hypertension & Diet

Fact Sheet

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Over 1/3 of adults globally suffer from high blood pressure (hypertension). Clinic visits, medications, and the treatment of complications associated with hypertension, such as heart failure, stroke, and renal disease, now constitute a significant portion of healthcare budgets worldwide.

High blood pressure is defined as a systolic blood pressure exceeding 130 mmHg or a diastolic blood pressure exceeding 80 mmHg, or individuals taking medication for hypertension. The ideal blood pressure range is approximately 115/75 mmHg, where the risk of heart attack and stroke-related deaths due to blood pressure is almost negligible.

Although drugs that lower blood pressure effectively reduce pressures, they do not address the underlying cause of the problem. Furthermore, all medications may have some unintended or unwanted side effects. However, achieving such low blood pressure levels without medication is not only possible but also normal for individuals adopting a healthy lifestyle including a whole food, plant-based diet.

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic mmHg		Diastolic mmHg
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120-129	and	Less than 80
Hypertension Stage 1	130-139	or	80-89
Hypertension Stage 2	140 or Higher	or	90 or Higher
Hypertensive Crisis (consult your provider)	Higher than 180	and/or	Higher than 120

Source: heart.org/bplevels

“Hypertension runs in my family.”

Extensive research indicates that adopting a healthy plant-based diet can have a profound impact on reducing the risk of hypertension, irrespective of a person's genetic predisposition. Numerous studies have consistently shown that plant-based diets, rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and nuts, can effectively reduce the incidence of hypertension. Guidelines from several organizations recommend dietary modifications as first-line intervention for hypertensive patients.

What Should I Eat to Control My Blood Pressure?

There isn't a single "magic" food that controls blood pressure. Salt certainly plays a role. But there is far more to a blood pressure-friendly diet than minimizing sodium intake.

A mountain of studies, dating back to the early 1920s, show that those eating a plant-based diet have lower blood pressure than those including meat, eggs and dairy in their diet. A plant-based diet is one based on **whole vegetables**, **fruits**, **grains**, **nuts**, **seeds**, and **legumes**.

A review published in JAMA Internal Medicine looked at 39 studies and found that plant-based diets were associated with lower blood pressures, compared with omnivorous diets. A study in the Journal of Geriatric Cardiology concluded that consuming a diet that is mostly or exclusively plant-based appears beneficial for both the prevention and treatment of hypertension.

In a study, which looked at 89,000 people, it found that those who only ate meat on a weekly basis had 23% lower rates of high blood pressure than heavy meat eaters. Those who cut out all meat except fish had 38% lower rates. Those eating no meat at all, vegetarians, had less than half the rate. Vegans—cutting out all meat, fish, dairy and eggs—had 75% lower rates of high blood pressure!

Why? Fruits, vegetables, and beans are rich in potassium and fiber, which helps lower blood pressure. Plant-based foods are also generally low in fat and sodium and are free of cholesterol. Avoiding meat, dairy products, and added oils also reduces the blood’s viscosity (or “thickness”), which makes the blood easier to pump. This also brings down blood pressure.

Keeping sodium low can also help lower blood pressure. Reduce sodium intake by limiting or avoiding processed foods, canned foods, and dairy products. This is where 75% of the sodium we consume comes from. Read the food labels of any packaged food. Also, eat at

home. The group Center for Science in the Public Interest found that 85 out of 102 meals at popular restaurants contained more than a full day's worth of sodium. Some of the meals had four days' worth of sodium.

You Have The Control

Most of the burden of hypertension, and related medical conditions, is largely preventable or reversible through dietary changes. When making a diet change, continue to work closely with your health care provider to manage changes in your medications.

The available scientific evidence accumulated in the past 30 years collectively indicates that the widespread adoption of a plant-based diet, along with exercising regularly, stress management, limiting alcohol, and not smoking can make hypertension a diagnosis of the past. True health is a process of optimal living with continual improvement in our actions over time. No matter our age or our clinical condition, we can all strive to eat better, move more and think more positively. We have the power to take control of our health.

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