Hypertension Intervention

New High Blood Pressure Guidelines Call for Earlier Action

For many years, we’ve been told that the standard measure for high blood pressure, also known as HBP or hypertension, was 140/90 or higher. Let’s talk about the current standard and what that means for you.

As you may have heard, this past fall, the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association revised their guidelines for blood pressure. Now, anyone with a reading at or above 130/80 is considered to have high blood pressure. In addition, a new “elevated” category has been added for readings between 120/80 and 129/80.

The authors hope the guidelines, which are based on hundreds of studies and clinical trials, will help people take steps to control their blood pressure (BP) earlier.

What does the change mean for you?

If the new guidelines put you in the high blood pressure bracket, you’re not alone. The change means that 46 percent of U.S. adults are identified as having HBP, compared to 32 percent under the previous definition.

So what should you do? First, take this seriously. HBP is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke—the two leading causes of death in the world—as well as other health problems.

Second, keep in mind that each individual’s blood pressure goals are unique. If you know or suspect you have HBP, it’s important to consult your doctor about the best course of action for you. The good news is lifestyle changes can help control blood pressure and may reduce or eliminate the need for medication for some individuals. Please see the next page for the most current, evidence-based suggestions.

Blood Pressure – An Overview

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a common condition in which the long-term force of the blood against your artery walls is high enough that it may eventually cause health problems, such as heart disease.

There are two types of high blood pressure: Primary (or essential) hypertension has no identifiable cause and usually develops gradually. Secondary hypertension is caused by an underlying health condition and tends to appear suddenly.

Most people with high blood pressure have no signs or symptoms until their blood pressure reaches dangerously high levels.

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7 “B’s” for Healthy BP

1. **Be a DASHer.** The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan is designed to boost intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while reducing sodium, saturated and trans-fats, and added sugar. On this plan you'll keep sodium under 2,400 mg per day and aim to eat a certain number of servings from various food groups.


2. **Be active.** While the following is the recommended goal, remember it’s perfectly okay to ease into it. Each week, participate in a total of 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, or 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity—or a combination of both types of physical activity. Aerobic activity is most effective when performed throughout the week and when it is for at least 10 minutes at a time.

   *Tip:* Try combining everyday chores with moderate-level sporting activities, such as walking.

3. **Be mindful of your weight.** Talk with your doctor about what a healthy weight range is for you. If weight loss is recommended, take it slow by using a healthy eating plan and gradually increasing your physical activity. Losing as little as five to 10 pounds may help lower your blood pressure and reduce the strain on your heart.

   *Tip:* Set milestone goals to stay motivated.

4. **Be moderate with alcohol.** In addition to raising blood pressure, alcohol can increase side effects and interfere with some blood pressure medications. It also adds empty calories to your diet. If you drink alcoholic beverages, have only a moderate amount—one drink a day for women, two drinks a day for men.

5. **Be tobacco free.** Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke increase the risk for the buildup of fatty substances (plaque) inside the arteries—a process that high blood pressure is known to accelerate.

   *Tip:* If you need help quitting, visit [PacificSource.com/member/tobacco-cessation](http://PacificSource.com/member/tobacco-cessation).

6. **Be a stress tamer.** The link between stress and high blood pressure is still being studied, but it is known that too much stress can increase risk factors like a poor diet and excessive alcohol consumption.

7. **Be diligent with meds.** If you need medication to help lower your blood pressure, take it as prescribed. If you experience side effects, talk with your doctor about your options.

   *Tip:* To remember to take medication, try connecting it to a daily routine (like breakfast), or setting alerts on your smartphone.

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**High Blood Pressure and Diabetes**

For people with diabetes, it’s especially important to keep blood pressure in check to avoid serious complications, such as heart attack, stroke, and kidney and eye disease.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), nearly 75% of adults with diabetes have high blood pressure. However, many of the lifestyle changes recommended for managing hypertension also have a positive effect on diabetes.

Do your best to follow a healthy diet, get exercise, and have regular medical checkups. Your doctor may want you to check and track your BP at home between appointments as well. All of these actions can make a big difference in managing your condition and your BP.
Stress Reduction Strategies

Stress is normal. It’s our physical and emotional reaction to changes in life. Chronic or long-term stress, however, may contribute to or worsen a range of health problems. Fortunately, there are many ways you can counterbalance and manage the stress in your life. Here are a few ideas:

- Give yourself enough time to get things done; don’t overcommit out of guilt.
- Schedule “me time” each weekend to relax and recharge.
- Think about problems that are under your control, and make a plan with concrete steps to solve them.
- Know your stress triggers, and avoid them if you can. Examples include rush-hour traffic and people who create drama.
- Laugh – watch a funny movie or hang out with friends who crack you up.
- Spend 10 to 15 minutes sitting quietly. Breathe deeply and visualize your happy place.
- Spend time developing supportive, nurturing relationships.
- Engage in physical activity regularly. Using your muscles helps you let go of tension.
- Practice gratitude. Thanking others can boost your level of feeling good about life and reduce stressful thoughts.

Member Corner:

Learning to Slow Down and Prioritize

Health Leads to Big Wins

When Melanie enrolled in PacificSource’s Think-Nourish-Move program, she was struggling. With her high standards about caring for her family, her health had taken a backseat, making it difficult to manage her diabetes and weight. With determination, hard work, and the support of her health coach, she’s been able to regain a healthy life balance and significantly improve her health. “I had to give myself permission to put me first. I had never done that before,” Melanie shared. “The sky did not fall as a result of that decision.”

She began tracking her calories and nutrients, and learned that she needed a variety of foods and tastes to feel satisfied and to stop cravings. When she had trouble getting enough protein, our Dietitian gave her suggestions that fit within her calorie goal.

Melanie also found new techniques for handling stress that didn’t involve eating. Meditation, time management, and learning to slow down are now skills she uses regularly.

Support and Accountability Pay Off

While “not a group meeting sort of person,” Melanie was glad to get great support from her health coach when feeling discouraged. And the phone appointments helped keep her accountable.

The combined effect of program support, a healthy diet, and better stress management made a world of difference. Melanie’s triglyceride numbers and other lab results dropped to normal range, and she lost 32 pounds.

She states, “I’m no longer a perfectionist and have a new appreciation for my body. I’ve learned to listen to it and support what it needs to keep me healthy.”

Melanie’s advice to anyone going through a similar health challenge: “Never give up. Plan a strategy to improve your physical and mental health, because they are connected. Use whatever tools are available to you, including healthcare staff and support groups. Then follow through—that’s the critical piece.”
Quinoa and Beans with Chili-Lime Vinaigrette

Ingredients
- 1 can pinto or other beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup quinoa, rinsed
- 1½ cups chicken or vegetable broth, or water
- ½ red bell pepper, finely diced
- 1 cup cucumber, seeded and finely diced
- ½ cup cilantro leaves, chopped

Vinaigrette
- 6 Tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 6 Tbsp. olive oil
- ½ tsp. ground cumin
- ½ tsp. chili powder
- Pinch cayenne
- Pinch of brown sugar

Instructions
1. Prepare quinoa using 1½ cups liquid
   (low-sodium chicken broth, veggie broth, or water).
2. While quinoa is cooking, rinse, chop, and dice veggies.
3. Combine ingredients for vinaigrette, and whisk or emulsify with hand blender.
4. Allow quinoa to cool some, then combine all ingredients in one dish, toss, and serve.

Makes 6 servings, about 1 cup each.

Nutrition Facts per Serving

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