

# May

## National High Blood Pressure Month

May is National High Blood Pressure Month. High blood pressure (also called hypertension) is a condition that affects nearly 1 out of 3 Americans, but as many as 1 in 5 adults don't know they have the condition. That's why it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly by a health professional. You can also check your blood pressure yourself at a pharmacy with a self-service blood pressure kiosk.

Even if you don't have "high" blood pressure right now, you may be one of the millions of people who is "borderline": your blood pressure is above 120 over 80 mm Hg but not yet above 140 over 90 mm Hg. For you, making changes in your lifestyle and diet recommendations now may postpone your need to start taking blood pressure medication in the future.

It's important to prevent or control high blood pressure because it can lead to other health problems like heart disease, stroke and kidney failure. The good news is that with diet, lifestyle and medication, high blood pressure is controllable. Diet and lifestyle contribute to high blood pressure in a few ways.

The following factors can raise your blood pressure:

- Eating a diet high sodium (often from prepared foods) that is also low in potassium (not enough fruits and vegetables)
- Being overweight
- Drinking large amounts of alcohol frequently
- Smoking

Following the MyPlate recommendation to make half your plate fruits and vegetables can help you reduce sodium, and increase your potassium. Higher potassium intakes can help lower high blood pressure or reduce your need for medication.

One of the best ways to reduce sodium is to cook foods at home; restaurant meals and many convenience foods are much higher in sodium than the foods you prepare yourself.

There are also many ways to use spices and flavors that provide great flavor and much less salt. For example, lemon juice gives a tang to chicken and seafood dishes with 0 milligrams of sodium.

Check the nutrition information on package labels and recipes to find out how much sodium (and potassium) is in the foods you eat. Less sodium and more potassium is a good thing when it comes to blood pressure.