Lower Your Blood Pressure*

CHALLENGE
If your blood pressure is high, lower it at least 5 points.

Employee Wellness Solutions Network
Nutrition | Balanced Lifestyle | Fitness

Requirements to Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Get your blood pressure checked. If it is 120/80 or higher, take steps to lower it, following the advice included in this Challenge. Keep a written record of the minutes you exercise and how many hours you rest. Also keep track of your diet, based on the DASH diet recommendations. Record the activities on your monthly Health Challenge Calendar.

2. Read "The problem of hypertension" and "Steps to a healthy blood pressure" below.

3. To complete the Challenge, lower your elevated blood pressure at least 5 points during the month.

4. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

* This challenge might take a few months to accomplish.

The problem of hypertension

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is becoming more prevalent. One in 3 American adults (age 18 and older) has hypertension. In people 60 years of age or older, the rate of high blood pressure is 60%.

Of those with known high blood pressure, only 31% have their blood pressure under good control (blood pressure less than 140/90). This trend is of major concern because high blood pressure increases the risk for heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, and blindness.
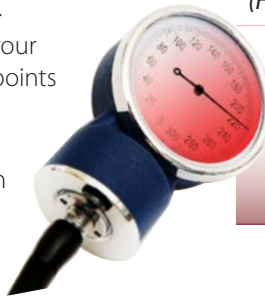
How high is high?

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is defined as 140/90 or higher. Based on ongoing research, blood pressure as low as 120/80 may in the long run still be too high! Starting with a blood pressure of 115/75, cardiovascular disease risk doubles with each increase of 20 systolic points (the number on the top) and 10 diastolic points (the number on the bottom). For example, risk would double when your blood pressure went to 135/85 and double again at 155/95.

Pressures from 120/80 to 139/89 indicate increased risk. Someone with blood pressure in this range is said to be pre-hypertensive. If you fall into the prehypertension range, the probable first step that your doctor will recommend is changing your lifestyle behaviors.

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic mm Hg (upper #)		Diastolic mm Hg (lower #)
Normal	less than 120	and	less than 80
Prehypertension	120 – 139	or	80 – 89
High Blood Pressure *(Hypertension) Stage 1*	140 – 159	or	90 – 99
High Blood Pressure *(Hypertension) Stage 2*	160 or higher	or	100 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis *(Emergency care needed)*	Higher than 180	or	Higher than 110

American Heart Association. 2011.

Steps to a healthy blood pressure

Long-term studies have shown that there are things that you can do to help prevent or lower high blood pressure. Lifestyle changes are not always easy to make but they can have a significant effect on reducing blood pressure. Whether your blood pressure is healthy or high, these lifestyle recommendations will help your overall health.

1. **Body weight.** One of the most important things you can do to reduce your risk for hypertension is to maintain a health body weight or lose weight if you are overweight. Ask your doctor what a healthy weight range is for you.

Assess your weight at: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/risk.htm

2. **Salt intake.** Salt is the major source of sodium. Reducing the amount of sodium that you consume in your diet can help to prevent high blood pressure especially for those people who are salt-sensitive – meaning a little bit of salt definitely affects their blood pressure. Limit your sodium intake to 1,500 mg (1.5 g) of sodium a day.

3. **Physical activity.** If you aren't physically active, get out there and start moving! Regular physical activity is important for helping to prevent many chronic diseases that can shorten your life span such as high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Aim for 30-60 minutes of moderate activity on most, preferably all days of the week. An example of moderate activity would be walking at a pace of 3-4 mph. You might not be able to meet those goals initially, but you can work up to them! It's important to get started at whatever level of physical activity you can do.

4. **Alcohol.** While many reports suggest the health benefits of a glass of wine at night, you have to be careful about the amount of alcohol you consume. More than 1 drink (for women) or 2 (for men) a day can actually increase your risk for various diseases.

How much do you know about the salt content of food? www.canr.uconn.edu/ nutsci/nutsci/outrch/pdf/ HowMuchSaltSugar.pdf

Learn about sodium in food: www.ext.colostate. edu/pubs/foodnut/09354. html

5. **Potassium.** Getting enough potassium in your diet is important for maintaining a healthy blood pressure. You should get about 4,700 mg of potassium a day to help prevent hypertension.

Learn about potassium in food: www.ext.colostate.edu/ pubs/foodnut/09355. html

6. **Food.** Choose fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, low-fat dairy products, and low-saturated fat foods. This eating plan is called the DASH diet and is proven effective in lowering blood pressure. Aim for 8-10 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

7. **Emotions.** Anger and stress can lead to high blood pressure. Learn to manage, reduce, and diffuse your anger and stress.

Read about the DASH diet: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/ health/public/heart/ hbp/dash/new_dash. pdf

8. **Rest.** Getting 7-8 hours of sleep daily is a good health practice linked to a longer life. It's also important to take frequent breaks, and find time to relax and unwind. Relaxation and recreation are good for your blood pressure and make life interesting and more fun.

9. **Smoking.** Every time you inhale smoke from a cigarette, your blood vessels constrict and your blood pressure rises. The only helpful approach is to avoid smoking and smoke altogether.

10. **Medications.** Ask your doctor if the prescription or over-the-counter medication you are taking may cause a rise in your blood pressure. If it does, ask for an alternative.

If the above lifestyle changes are not sufficient, your doctor might prescribe medications to help.

Check your blood pressure regularly

Watch a video that explains blood pressure: http://tinyurl.com/ ydkbqoa

High blood pressure is called the "silent killer" because it often gives no warning signs or symptoms. Even if everyone seems healthy, be sure you and your family have your blood pressure checked regularly.

A single high reading does not necessarily mean that you have high blood pressure. You need to have your blood pressure checked on a regular basis using a reliable machine or by a health professional. Machines used at the grocery store may be reliable, but they may also be totally inaccurate. Ask your healthcare provider how often you should check your blood pressure.

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Instructions

1. Post the Health Challenge Calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. To complete the Challenge, you must lower your blood pressure at least 5 points, using the recommendations in this Challenge.
3. Then keep up this health practice for a lifetime of best health!
4. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

MONTH: _____   HC = Health Challenge   ex. min. = exercise minutes

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	
HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	
HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	
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HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	HC ex. min._____	

_____ Number of days this month I engaged in blood pressure-lowering activities (e.g. limited sodium, got enough rest, ate 4,700 mg potassium)

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking

Other wellness projects completed this month:

_____

_____

Name _____ Date _____