

MANAGING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE DURING COVID-19

A lot has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic started. We're all taking steps to slow the spread and protect ourselves from the virus. This may include delaying in-person medical appointments for chronic conditions like high blood pressure. But managing your high blood pressure is still very important during this time. This guide will talk about ways you and your healthcare provider can lower your blood pressure, even if you can't go into the clinic.

Why is my blood pressure important?

You can think of blood pressure as water running through a hose. You need enough pressure to get blood and oxygen to your brain and organs. But too much pressure (called hypertension) can damage those organs, similar to watering your garden with a fire hose instead of a sprinkler. By lowering your blood pressure, you can stop the damage and reduce the risk of problems like [heart disease](#), kidney disease, and [stroke](#).

Is there a connection between high blood pressure and COVID-19?

Studies show that people with high blood pressure are more likely to get sick with COVID-19. They are also more likely to have complications if they get the infection. The best way to protect yourself is to [avoid getting sick](#) by washing your hands often, wearing a mask in public, and practicing good physical distancing.

How can I manage my high blood pressure?

The most important thing you can do is talk with your healthcare provider and follow their instructions. Some clinics allow patients to schedule phone or video appointments. If your clinic has this option, you can measure your blood pressure at home and visit with your provider virtually.

CHECK YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE REGULARLY

High blood pressure often has no symptoms, so checking your blood pressure is the only way to know if it is too high. A lot of people usually get their blood pressure checked in the clinic or at their pharmacy. Unfortunately, this may be harder to do during the pandemic. If you and your provider think it is a good idea, you can get a blood pressure cuff to use at home.

How can I check my own blood pressure?

1. You will need a blood pressure monitor and cuff.
2. Avoid smoking, exercising, and drinking anything with caffeine for at least thirty minutes.
3. Rest in a chair for at least 5 minutes. Make sure your back is supported, your arm is relaxed, and your feet are flat on the floor.
4. Read the instructions on your blood pressure monitor to make sure it is placed correctly on your arm.
5. Write down your blood pressure readings.

Your provider can tell you how often to check your blood pressure.

For more information, visit the American Heart Association's website for [Blood Pressure Measurement Instructions](#) or the CDC's website for how to [Measure your Blood Pressure](#).

What should my blood pressure be?

Generally, many providers will want your blood pressure to be less than 140/90. However, your provider may give you a different target blood pressure based on your age and your other health conditions. Talk to your provider to see what your target blood pressure should be.

If your blood pressure is...	You should...
Generally below 140/90 or your specific target	Keep checking your blood pressure.
Generally higher than 140/90 or your specific target	Call your healthcare provider. They may need to adjust your medicine.
Higher than 180/120	This could be an emergency! Wait two minutes and check again. If it is still higher than 180/120 call your provider. Call 911 immediately if you have any emergency symptoms. **

***Emergency Symptoms: Chest or back pain, shortness of breath, numbness, weakness, confusion, or difficulty speaking.*

TAKE YOUR MEDICINE

It is important to take your medicine exactly as prescribed. You can always ask your provider or the pharmacist if you're worried about a medicine or have questions on how to take it.

Try to make sure you have enough medicine on hand to last several months so you can limit the times you need to leave the house. It's a good idea to ask your health care team, including your pharmacist, if you can get a larger supply than normal.

What if I forget to take my medicine?

Take your missed pill as soon as you remember. If it's almost time for your next pill, skip the missed dose. Do not take two doses at once unless your provider or pharmacist tells you to. Talk to your provider or pharmacist if you have specific questions.

To help you remember in the future, try setting an alarm on your phone, using a pill box, or putting your medicine in an obvious place (like the kitchen table or next to your toothbrush).

What if I want to stop my medicine?

Never stop taking medications without talking to your provider. You may develop serious health problems if you suddenly stop one of these medicines. If you want to stop the medicine, call your provider and set up an appointment.

- Watch the [CDC's video on Tips for Taking Blood Pressure Medicines As Directed](#) for useful tips.
- To learn more about blood pressure medications, visit the [CDC's Blood Pressure Medicines](#) website.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can lower your blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Be Physically Active

Physical activity can help you lower your blood pressure and stay at a healthy weight. The CDC recommends that adults get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (like a brisk walk or bike ride) every week. That's about 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.

Eat Healthy

Eating well can help keep your blood pressure at a healthy level and protect against heart disease and stroke. Talk with your provider about foods that are rich in potassium, fiber, and protein and lower in [salt](#) (sodium) and saturated fat.

- The [DASH \(Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension\) Eating Plan](#) is a healthy diet plan with a proven record of helping people lower their blood pressure.
- Visit the [CDC's Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity](#) website to learn more about healthy eating and nutrition.

Do Not Smoke

Smoking raises your blood pressure. If you do not

smoke, do not start. If you do smoke, quitting will lower your risk of heart attacks and strokes. Your provider can suggest ways to help you quit.

You can call the Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) for help.

Limit your alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can also raise your blood pressure. Men should have no more than 2 alcoholic drinks per day, and women should have no more than 1 alcoholic drink per day. Visit the [CDC's Alcohol and Public Health](#) website for more information.

Manage your stress and sleep well

Stress and poor sleep can negatively affect your health, including your blood pressure. This is a difficult time for many people, and may lead to increased stress and anxiety.

- To learn more about coping mechanisms, visit the [CDC's Stress and Coping](#) website.
- To learn more about resources on how to get better sleep, visit the [CDC's Sleep and Sleep Disorders](#) website.

Avoid medicines that raise your blood pressure

These include over-the-counter medicines like nasal decongestants and certain painkillers (called NSAIDs) like ibuprofen or naproxen. You should also avoid foods like licorice and certain herbal supplements which can raise your blood pressure.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY PROVIDER OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM?

Call your provider if...

• Your blood pressure is higher than 180/120 and you have no other symptoms.

• If you have questions about your blood pressure measurement trends or unusual symptoms.

Call 911 if...

• Your blood pressure is greater than 180/120

AND

• You have chest or back pain, difficulty breathing, numbness, weakness, change in vision, severe headache, confusion or difficulty speaking.

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