

High Blood Pressure:

*Nearly 1 in 3 U.S. adults has high blood pressure.
It is often called “The Silent Killer” because it has no symptoms.
The good news: You can take steps to prevent high blood pressure.*



What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the artery walls. It is measured with two numbers, **systolic** and **diastolic**. Systolic pressure is the force on the arteries when the heart beats. Diastolic is the force when the heart is at rest. Both types of pressure are measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). The numbers are usually written one before or above the other, such as 120/80 mm Hg—this would be spoken “120 over 80.” High blood pressure is also called **hypertension**.

	Normal	Pre-hypertension	Hypertension
Systolic	lower than 120	120-139	140 or higher
Diastolic	lower than 80	80-89	90 or higher

Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart failure, heart attack, or kidney failure.

Who gets high blood pressure?

Many people get high blood pressure when they get older. In fact, more than 50% of Americans aged 60 years and older have high blood pressure! Your chances of getting high blood pressure are also higher if you:

- Are African American
- Are overweight
- Are a man over the age of 45
- Are a woman over the age of 55
- Have a family history of high blood pressure
- Have prehypertension

Other things that can raise blood pressure include:

- Eating too much salt
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Not eating enough potassium
- Not exercising
- Taking certain medicines
- Stress that is long-lasting

How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

You can find out if you have high blood pressure by having it measured regularly. Having your blood pressure checked is quick and easy. Your doctor or nurse will use a stethoscope or electronic sensor, and a blood pressure cuff. Most doctors will check your blood pressure several different times before deciding you have high blood pressure. You can also check your blood pressure at home with a home monitor, available at pharmacies. Check with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist to make sure you are using it correctly.

How can I prevent high blood pressure?

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Be physically active on most days of the week.
- Limit alcohol.
- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products.
- Limit salt and sodium.



You should aim to consume no more than 2300 mg of sodium per day, or less if you have high blood pressure or are at risk for developing it. Avoid adding salt to your food, but also be aware of the sodium in processed foods. Most fast food, canned soups, crackers, pretzels, chips, frozen meals, and vegetable juice are especially high in sodium. Look for foods with “Low-Sodium,” “Reduced Sodium,” or “Light in Sodium” on the label. Use Nutrition Facts labels to compare products before you buy.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size ½ cup (114g)	
Servings Per Container 4	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 90	Calories from Fat 30
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 3g	5%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 300mg	13%
Total Carbohydrate 13g	4%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 3g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A 80%	Vitamin C 60%
Calcium 4%	Iron 4%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	

Check out **servings size** and **servings per container**. If you ate the whole package of this food, for example, you would multiply the nutrition facts by 4 because it contains four ½ cup servings.

Look at the sodium facts. Foods providing 5% or less of the Daily Value (120 mg or less) are low in sodium. Foods providing 20% or more (480 mg or more) are high. **Avoid foods high in sodium.**

Cooking tips

- ❖ Season foods with fresh or dried herbs like dill, tarragon, oregano, basil, rosemary, sage, or bay leaves.
- ❖ Use garlic, lemon juice, pepper, and vinegar instead of salt to add pizzazz.
- ❖ Try store-bought no-salt seasonings, such as Mrs. Dash.
- ❖ If you *must* add salt, do so after the food is cooked rather than throughout the cooking. Just one teaspoon of salt is 2300 mg of sodium—a whole day’s worth!

What if I already have high blood pressure?

Healthy lifestyle changes can sometimes lower a person’s blood pressure. Sometimes these changes aren’t enough and medication is needed. There are many different medications doctors can prescribe to help keep your blood pressure under control. Talk to your doctor if you have questions about your blood pressure.

How can I learn more?

- ✓ You can make an appointment with a UCSF registered dietitian by calling (415) 353-2291.
- ✓ Visit the website of the American Heart Association at <http://www.americanheart.org>
- ✓ Visit the website of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov> and click on the “Heart/Vascular” link for info about high blood pressure.
- ✓ Visit <http://www.saltfreelife.com>, the website for Salt Free Life magazine, for free low sodium recipes.
- ✓ To find more healthy recipes, try *American Heart Association Low-Salt Cookbook, Second Edition*, published by Clarkson Potter/Publishers.