Hypertension Management: Tips to Keep your Blood Pressure Down

Studies have shown that certain lifestyle changes can result in significantly lower blood pressure. So if your doctor has diagnosed you with high blood pressure, he or she may recommend that you take up some new, healthier habits to help get it under control. Most of these lifestyle changes can also help prevent high blood pressure if you don't already have it — the guidelines for hypertension prevention and management are often one and the same.

Eat a Balanced Diet.
There is evidence that people who consume a healthy diet can prevent high blood pressure or lower blood pressure if they already have hypertension. Aim for a diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, whole grains, nuts and seeds, and lean protein sources, such as skinless poultry and fish. It should also be low in saturated fat, total fat, cholesterol, and added sugars — and skip the trans fat altogether.

Reduce Salt Intake.
Limiting the amount of sodium (salt) in your diet can also help control high blood pressure. General guidelines are to consume less than 2,400 milligrams of sodium per day, but if you already have high blood pressure, that number drops. And the lower your sodium intake, the better it is for your blood pressure. In one study, people who consumed less than 1,500 mg of sodium a day experienced the most significant reductions in blood pressure. Remember to count the sodium in packaged foods as well as any table salt you use when calculating how much you're eating.

Maintain a Healthy Weight.
If you're overweight, losing as few as 10 pounds can lower high blood pressure. Carrying extra weight not only increases your risk of high blood pressure, it also makes you more likely to develop cholesterol problems and diabetes, which are two more risk factors for heart disease. Talk with your doctor about your weight. If you are overweight, he or she can recommend a safe weight loss program.

Exercise Regularly.
An active lifestyle is one of the best ways to prevent or control high blood pressure. In addition to its effects on hypertension, regular exercise can also help you maintain a healthy weight and reduce stress. As long as your doctor says that exercise is safe for you, aim to get at least 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity on most days of the week, and incorporate flexibility and strengthening exercises into your weekly routine.

Limit Alcohol Intake.
Drinking alcohol in moderation is generally not harmful and may even have some heart health benefits, but drinking too much has been shown to lead to high blood pressure and other serious health problems. Limit your alcohol intake to one drink per day if you are a woman or two drinks per day if you are a man. One drink is 12 ounces of beer, four ounces of wine, one and a half ounces of 80-proof liquor, or one ounce of 100-proof liquor.
Stop Smoking to Limit Artery Damage.
Smoking is not considered to be a cause of high blood pressure, but it can damage the walls of your blood vessels and harden your arteries, making it especially dangerous for people who have high blood pressure. If you don't smoke, don't start, and if you do smoke, make quitting a top priority. Studies have shown that your risk of having a heart attack dips just one year after you quit smoking.

Monitor Your Blood Pressure at Home.
There are often no warning signs that you have high blood pressure before it damages your body. That is why it is important to keep track of your blood pressure, to make sure it is under control and being managed properly. Since your blood pressure can fluctuate between doctor visits, consider investing in a home monitoring kit, then regularly record your blood pressure readings so your doctor can have a clearer picture of your blood pressure over time.

Manage Stress to Manage Hypertension.
Stress can cause temporary increases in high blood pressure, but scientists are still unsure how stress affects blood pressure over the long term. Evidence suggests, however, that stress can lead to overeating, smoking, drinking, and other blood pressure-raising activities. So pay attention to your stress levels, and avoid unnecessarily stressful activities and events. Remember that regular exercise reduces stress as it improves heart health.

Practice Relaxation Techniques.
Taking time out to unwind each day may help you control your high blood pressure. Find some relaxation techniques that you enjoy and practice them regularly. Examples of relaxation practices include meditating in a peaceful place for 15 to 20 minutes, expressing your gratitude for the positive things in your life, and engaging in soothing physical activities such as yoga or tai chi.

Take Blood Pressure Medications.
Although it may sound obvious, taking doctor-prescribed medications to lower blood pressure is a must to keep your blood pressure under control. Unfortunately, because high blood pressure doesn’t cause symptoms, people forget how important it is to take these drugs as prescribed. To help you remember, take them at the same time each day, write yourself notes, and enlist a friend or family member to remind you, too. And never skip a dose or stop taking your blood pressure medications without talking with your doctor first.

To learn more about hypertension and the services offered at Cone Health visit www.conehealth.com, or call 336-832-7000.

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