The Role of Food and Your Health: Blood Pressure

Time: 70 Minutes

Join us to learn how food can impact overall health and why blood pressure is a critical factor for your health. Receive guidance to help you set goals to improve your health.

OBJECTIVES:

- Meet with a health professional to obtain a personal blood pressure reading.
- Understand how food affects your blood pressure.
- Describe what causes high blood pressure.
- Identify at least two strategies for controlling blood pressure.

SETUP

- Review resource list and print it out. Purchase all necessary supplies after reviewing the HFL Cost Calculator.
- Set up stations for participant cholesterol and blood sugar measurements.
- Contact health care professionals in advance to ask them to attend the lesson event. They’ll be taking the participants’ blood pressure readings and briefly discussing the results with them.
- Provide computer, internet access, and projector, if available.

DEMO (10 Minutes)

- Play video(s) or demonstrate content (see demo script).

ACTIVITY (20 Minutes)

- Participants will meet one-on-one with health care professionals to talk about their personal biometric numbers and develop a plan of action.

RECAP (10 Minutes)

- Pass out handout(s) and review with participants.

GOAL SETTING/CLOSING (20 Minutes)

- Engage in a goal setting activity from the bank of options provided in the Welcome Toolkit. Pass out the Setting SMART Goals handout to participants.
- Thank participants and encourage them to join the next activity. (Provide date/time/location if known.)
The Role of Food and Your Health: Blood Pressure Resource List

HANDOUTS/VIDEOS
Find these resources on AHA’s YouTube channel or heart.org/healthyforgood

- Video – The Role of Food and Your Health: Blood Pressure
- Recipe – Tomato Basil Soup (low-sodium soup)

Find these resources in this lesson
- Handout – Life’s Simple 7: Manage Blood Pressure Infographic
- Handout – Blood Pressure Chart
- Handout – How to Measure Blood Pressure
- Handout – The Salty Six Infographic
- Handout – Setting SMART Goals

SPACE SETUP
- Chairs and tables for participants
- Pens for participants
- Folders
- Computer, internet access and projector, if available

ACTIVITY SUPPLIES*
- Blood pressure monitors
- Blank index cards (for health care professional to write down blood pressure measurements for participants)
- Pens

*Purchase appropriate number of supplies for your participants.
When your heart pumps blood through the blood vessels, the blood pushes against the walls of your vessels. This pushing creates blood pressure.

We need blood pressure to move the blood throughout our bodies, so it can provide our organs and tissues with the oxygen they need. Healthy arteries (the blood vessels that carry oxygen-rich blood from the heart to the rest of the body) are elastic. They can stretch to allow more blood to push through them. How much they stretch depends on how hard the blood pushes against the artery walls.

For your arteries to stay healthy, it’s important that your blood pressure be within a healthy range. For some of us, blood pressure can get too high. High blood pressure is called hypertension.

Blood pressure is measured using a blood pressure monitor and it’s recorded as two numbers. The systolic pressure (top number) measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart is pumping blood. The diastolic pressure (bottom number) measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart is resting between beats.

Most of the time, high blood pressure doesn’t have a cause and is sometimes called the “silent killer” because people don’t have symptoms. However, there are some risk factors (or conditions that can make us more likely to develop it) for high blood pressure. Some risk factors are outside of our control, like family history, age, gender and race. There are other risk factors that we can control, like poor diet (especially one that’s high in sodium), physical inactivity, smoking and drinking too much alcohol. By themselves or in combination, these factors play a big role in developing hypertension.

High blood pressure, if not treated, can cause our hearts to work harder to supply the blood our bodies need. In addition, high blood pressure can damage the inner lining of the arteries, leading to coronary heart disease, heart failure, heart attack, stroke and other serious conditions.
Today, you are going to meet with a health care professional and learn about your blood pressure. To ensure your privacy, the professional will write down your measurements. You’ll also learn about healthy and unhealthy blood pressure ranges.

If your blood pressure measurement is not in the ‘normal’ range, we recommend you visit with your own health care provider for advice and further consultation.
HOW TO MANAGE BLOOD PRESSURE

1 UNDERSTAND READINGS

The first step to managing blood pressure is to understand what the levels mean and what is considered normal, elevated, high blood pressure (hypertension) and hypertensive crisis. heart.org/BPlevels

Blood pressure is typically recorded as two numbers:

Systolic
The top number, the higher of the two numbers, measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats (when the heart muscle contracts).

Diastolic
The bottom number, the lower of the two numbers, measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart is resting between heart beats.

Read as “117 over 76 millimeters of mercury.”

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

EAT SMART
Eat a healthy diet of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, plant-based proteins, lean animal proteins and fish. Limit sodium, saturated fats and added sugars. Limit sugary foods and drinks, fatty or processed meats, salty foods, refined carbohydrates and highly processed foods. heart.org/EatSmart

MOVE MORE
Physical activity helps control blood pressure, weight and stress levels. heart.org/MoveMore

MANAGE WEIGHT
If you’re overweight, even a slight weight loss can reduce high blood pressure. heart.org/Weight

DON’T SMOKE
Every time you smoke, vape or use tobacco, the nicotine can cause a temporary increase in blood pressure. heart.org/Tobacco

SLEEP WELL
Short sleep (less than 6 hours) and poor-quality sleep are associated with high blood pressure.

2 TRACK LEVELS

American Heart Association Check. Change. Control.

Check. Change. Control helps you track your progress in reducing blood pressure. Track online at ccctracker.com/AHA

LEARN MORE AT HEART.ORG/MYLIFECHECK AND HEART.ORG/HBP

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Two numbers are recorded when measuring your blood pressure. The top, or upper, number (called systolic pressure) measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The bottom, or lower, number (called diastolic pressure) measures the pressure while your heart rests between beats. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

The five blood pressure ranges as recognized by the American Heart Association are:

**Normal**
Blood pressure numbers of less than 120/80 mm Hg are considered within the normal range. If your results fall in this category, stick with heart-healthy habits like following a balanced diet and getting regular exercise.

**Elevated**
Elevated blood pressure readings consistently range from 120-129 systolic and less than 80 mm Hg diastolic. People with elevated blood pressure are likely to develop high blood pressure unless steps are taken to control the condition.

**Hypertension Stage 1**
Blood pressure consistently ranges from 130-139 systolic or 80-89 mm Hg diastolic. Health care providers are likely to prescribe lifestyle changes and may consider adding blood pressure medication based on your risk of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD), such as heart attack or stroke.

**Hypertension Stage 2**
Blood pressure consistently ranges at 140 systolic or 90 mm Hg diastolic or higher. Health care providers are likely to prescribe blood pressure medications and lifestyle changes.

**Hypertensive Crisis**
This stage requires medical attention. If your blood pressure readings suddenly exceed 180/120 mm Hg, wait five minutes and then test again. If your readings are still unusually high, contact your health care provider immediately.

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**Blood Pressure Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY</th>
<th>SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)</th>
<th>DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NORMAL</strong></td>
<td>LESS THAN 120</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ELEVATED</strong></td>
<td>120 - 129</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1</strong></td>
<td>130 - 139</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2</strong></td>
<td>140 OR HIGHER</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HYPERTENSION CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)</strong></td>
<td>HIGHER THAN 180</td>
<td>and/or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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BLOOD PRESSURE MEASUREMENT INSTRUCTIONS

1. Take at least two readings 1 min. apart in morning before taking medications, and in evening before dinner. Record all results.
2. Use properly calibrated and validated instrument. Check the cuff size and fit.
3. Place the bottom of the cuff above the bend of the elbow.
4. Make sure you're relaxed. Sit still in a chair with your feet flat on the floor with your back straight and supported.
5. Rest in a chair for at least 5 min. with your left arm resting comfortably on a flat surface at heart level. Sit calmly and don't talk.
6. Don't smoke, exercise, drink caffeinated beverages or alcohol within 30 min. of measurement.

American Heart Association recommended blood pressure levels

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<td>HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)</td>
<td>HIGHER THAN 160</td>
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*Blood pressure higher than 120/80 mm Hg is a crisis.

LEARN MORE AT HEART.ORG/HBP

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Setting SMART Goals

**SPECIFIC**
- What exactly do you want to accomplish?

**MEASURABLE**
- How will you track your progress towards your goal?

**ACHIEVABLE**
- Is reaching your goal possible with your full effort?

**REALISTIC**
- Do you have the resources and ability to achieve your goal? If not, how can you get them?

**TIME-BOUND**
- When will your goal be achieved?

**EXAMPLE OF A SMART GOAL:**
I will increase the number of fruit servings I eat daily by 2 cups within the next 3 months.

Personal SMART goal: