

BLOOD

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE Control and prevention

|| PART 2

IN the previous article, we dealt with some facts relating to hypertension as well as risk factors that may precipitate this condition. In this article, we will deal with the most important aspects relating to its control and prevention.

High blood pressure can damage one's health in many ways. It can seriously affect important organs such as the heart and brain.

High blood pressure can harden arteries, which in turn will result in a decreased flow of blood and oxygen to the heart, which subsequently leads to heart disease. In addition, a decrease in the flow of blood to the heart can cause: i) chest pain, also called angina; ii) heart failure, when the heart can't pump enough blood and oxygen to other organs; iii) heart attack, which occurs when the blood supply to the heart is blocked and heart muscle begins to die due to lack of oxygen. The longer the blood flow is blocked, the greater the damage to the heart.

High blood pressure can burst or block the arteries that supply blood and oxygen to the brain, causing a stroke. Brain cells die during a stroke because they do not get enough oxygen. Stroke can cause serious speech, movement, and other basic activity disabilities. A stroke can also kill.

Adults suffering from diabetes, high blood pressure, or both, also have a higher risk of developing chronic kidney disease. Approximately one in three adults with diabetes and one in five adults with high blood pressure suffer from chronic kidney disease.

Fortunately, blood pressure can be controlled thus lowering the risk of serious health problems.

Lifestyle changes can be made that will help to control blood pressure. Your doctor might also prescribe medications to help. By learning to control your blood pressure, you will also lower its harmful risks. Lifestyle changes for controlling blood pressure are similar to those for preventing high blood pressure.

Work with your healthcare team

Team-based care that includes you, your doctor, and other healthcare providers can help reduce and control blood pressure.

If you already suffer from high blood pressure, your doctor may prescribe medication and lifestyle changes which are just as important as medication. Follow your doctor's instructions and stay on your medications. Do not stop taking your medications before talking to your doctor or pharmacist.

All drugs may have side effects, so talk to your doctor regularly. As your blood pressure improves, your doctor will need to check it often.

Lifestyle changes

- **Diet.** Keep to a healthy diet:
 - ▷ Low in salt (sodium), fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Most of our sodium intake is in the form of salt, the vast majority is contained in processed and restaurant food. Our body needs a small amount of sodium, but too much sodium is bad for one's health. Did you know that sodium and potassium both affect blood pressure?

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Physical activity can help maintain a healthy weight and lower blood pressure levels

In general, people who reduce their sodium and increase their potassium intake will benefit from a lower blood pressure, reducing the risk for other serious health problems. Eating enough potassium each day can help balance out some of the harmful effects that a high sodium intake can have on blood pressure. However, lowering sodium intake is the key factor in this balance.

▷ Fresh fruits and vegetables are also of utmost importance in controlling blood pressure levels.



- **Enough physical activity.** Physical activity can help maintain a healthy weight and lower blood pressure levels. Moderate-intensity exercise is recommended, such as for example a brisk walk or bicycle ride two-and-a-half hours per week.
- **Do not smoke.** Cigarette smoking raises blood pressure and puts one at a higher risk of suffering a heart attack and stroke. If you do not smoke, do not start. If you do smoke, quitting will lower your risk for heart disease. Your doctor can suggest ways to help you stop smoking.
- **Maintaining a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese increases the risk for high blood pressure. To determine if your weight is in a healthy range, doctors often calculate body mass index (BMI). Sometimes waist and hip measurements are taken to measure excess body fat.
- **Limit alcohol intake.** Avoid drinking too much alcohol, which can raise your blood pressure. Men should have no more than two drinks per day, and women only one.

Article supplied by the Hospital Particular do Algarve Group, with hospitals in Alvor and Gambelas (Faro)



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