

Elevated Blood Pressure: *Act Now to Protect Your Health*

What is “elevated” blood pressure?

“Elevated” blood pressure means your blood pressure (BP) is higher than normal — but not high enough to be diagnosed as stage 1 or 2 “high BP.” You have elevated blood pressure if your BP falls in this range:

- Top number (systolic BP) **between 120 and 129**
OR
- Bottom number (diastolic BP) **less than 80**

These are examples of elevated blood pressure measurements: 126/78, 124/75, 128/79.

To be sure of your BP measurement, have it taken by a healthcare provider.

Of course, if your healthcare provider has already told you that you have “high BP” and you are taking medicine to treat it, a BP reading in this range does not change that diagnosis.

How common is it?

Elevated blood pressure is very common — more than 1 in 3 people have it. In some, it’s even more common:

- It’s more common in men than women.
- It’s more common in black people, especially in black people with risk factors such as diabetes.
- It’s more common in all people as they get older.

Why is elevated blood pressure important?

If you have elevated blood pressure, you probably don’t feel any different, but you still need to take action.



“My doctor said my BP was elevated — and if I wanted to keep my good health, I had to change a few habits. That’s when I started walking every day. I’ve never felt better.”

Your risk for bigger problems is much higher. You have greater risk of:

- **Developing high blood pressure.** BP increases as we age. If you have elevated BP now, you’re much more likely to have high BP in the next few years. Having high BP greatly increases your risk of many problems, such as heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, and problems related to diabetes.
- **Heart disease.** Compared to people their same age with normal BP, people with elevated BP are almost twice as likely to have major heart problems.
- **Having a stroke at a younger age.**

What can I do about it?

Consider yourself lucky. Knowing you have elevated BP gives you a chance to take action **before** problems take hold. BP medicine is not recommended at this stage. Instead, doctors recommend that you:

- **Start making lifestyle changes now,** as outlined on page 2 of this handout.
- **Check your BP regularly.** Have it checked by a healthcare provider at least once a year.

Lifestyle changes to lower your BP

The habits listed below are proven to lower BP.

Making a few of these changes now can protect your health and improve the quality of your life — now, and for many years to come.

☐ Eat well

- Eat MORE: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, unsaturated fats and oils (such as olive oil or canola oil), lean proteins, and low-fat dairy.
- Eat LESS: saturated fats and sugar.
- For more ideas on eating well, ask for the handout [*Live Well, Eat Well*](#).

☐ Move more

- Set aside some time every day when you can get your heart rate up a little. The goal is to build up to **150 minutes or more a week** — or 30 minutes most days of the week. If you're getting vigorous activity like jogging, 75 minutes per week is enough. If you count steps, aim for 10,000 steps per day.
- For more ideas on physical activity, ask for the handout [*Live Well, Move More*](#).

☐ Consume less sodium (salt)

Reduce sodium in your diet to no more than 2400 mg per day. If you can't reduce sodium that much, then reduce sodium by at least 1000 mg per day from what you're having now.

☐ Limit alcohol

- For men, have no more than 2 drinks a day.
- For women, have no more than 1 drink a day.

☐ Quit tobacco

- Quit smoking or chewing tobacco, and avoid being around second-hand smoke.
- For help quitting, ask for the booklet [*Quitting Tobacco*](#).



One new habit at a time

This page lists several changes you can make to start lowering your BP. You don't need to do them all at once! Mark a beside 1 thing you feel ready and able to change right now. Then get more support with that change.

Once that change becomes an everyday habit, pat yourself on the back and add in another.

☐ Reduce stress

- Identify what's causing stress in your life, and take steps to reduce stress in your life. You may need support from the people around you.
- For more ideas on reducing stress, ask for the handout [*Live Well, Stress Less*](#).

☐ Lose weight

Losing weight is one of the best things you can do to lower your BP. Losing weight is not a lifestyle habit, but the result of several habits. The habits that help you lower your BP will also help you lose weight.

- Losing as little as 5% to 10% of your current weight is enough to start lowering your BP. That's 10 to 20 pounds if you're starting at 200 pounds.
- Your healthcare provider can help you find out what your target weight should be.
- For help losing weight — and making these lifestyle changes — ask about Intermountain's nutrition program [*The Weigh to Health*](#).



Where can I get support?

Your healthcare providers can give you more information about any of these lifestyle changes, and where to go for help. To learn more about blood pressure, ask for the booklet [*BP Basics*](#).



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