

## Q. My blood pressure is 130/83. Should I be concerned?

**A.** Blood pressure readings show two numbers with a slash between them: for example, 115/75. When people say the numbers, they say, "115 over 75." The first (top) number is called *systolic pressure*. Systolic pressure reflects the highest pressure in the artery and coincides with the contraction phase of the heartbeat – when the heart is pushing more blood into the arteries thus raising the pressure.

The *diastolic pressure* is the second (bottom) number of a blood pressure reading. Diastolic pressure coincides with the heart's resting phase between beats. This is the lowest the pressure gets in the arteries.

The higher your blood pressure, the harder your heart has to work to deliver blood and oxygen to all of the parts of your body. As blood pressure increases above a reading of 115/75, damage can occur to the arteries, heart, kidneys, and eyes. Studies show that the risk of a heart attack or stroke doubles for every 20-point increase in systolic pressure (the first number) or for every 10-point increase in diastolic pressure (the second number) above a healthy pressure of 115/75.

## Hypertension?



Elevated blood pressure (120/80 and higher) makes the heart work overtime. Untreated, high blood pressure can damage the arteries and the heart itself. A blood pressure of 130/80 or higher is moderately elevated and does carry a health hazard, especially if you have diabetes or kidney disease.

A blood pressure reading of 130/83 falls in the prehypertension range (120/80 – 139/89). You should have your blood pressure checked two or three times to see if it remains at this level. If so, your first step should be to make lifestyle changes to lower blood pressure (or to keep it from becoming higher).

- 1. Maintain a healthy weight (BMI < 25).** Use a BMI calculator to determine your present BMI. [www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/](http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/)
- 2. Be physically active.** Aim for 30-60 minutes of moderate activity, such as brisk walking, most days of the week.
- 3. Eat healthy foods.** Follow a healthy eating plan (such as the DASH diet) that is high in fruits and vegetables (8-9 servings daily), whole grains, and nonfat and low-fat dairy, and low in saturated fat, sweets, and added sugar.



**4. Limit salt (sodium)** to 2,300 mg/day (less than 1,500 mg/day for people over age 50 and those with high blood pressure). Read food labels.

**5. Limit alcohol.** If you drink alcoholic beverages, limit intake. Alcohol can increase blood pressure.

**6. Eat potassium-rich foods.** Potassium helps prevent and control blood pressure. Be sure to get enough potassium in the foods you eat. Some good sources are dry peas, dry beans, green beans, apricots, peaches, bananas, prunes and prune juice, orange juice, lima beans, stewed tomatoes, spinach, plantain, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, potatoes, winter squash, low-fat or nonfat milk, yogurt, and fish.

If after following these recommendations your blood pressure has not dropped sufficiently, download the DASH diet (see link below) and follow it carefully. Ask your doctor for further evaluation and guidance.

**For more information:**

*Your Guide to Lowering High Blood Pressure,*  
by the National Institutes of Health

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/>

*Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure with DASH,*  
by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/>

