

# 6 lifestyle changes to help men manage high blood pressure

Medically reviewed by

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## What you need to know

- Around 50% of men in the U.S. and up to 35% of men worldwide have high blood pressure, which can be dangerous if left untreated.
- You may need to take medication to treat high blood pressure, but there are lifestyle changes that can help too: Changing your diet, getting active, and cutting back on alcohol are great places to start.

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## What is high blood pressure anyway?

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Your heart helps move blood around your body through your blood vessels (veins and arteries). Arteries carry oxygen-rich blood away from the heart and lungs to your organs and muscles so they can work properly. Veins carry blood back to the heart and lungs to get more oxygen. As blood moves around your body, it pushes against the walls of veins and arteries. Your blood pressure level is a measure of just how hard your blood pushes.

High blood pressure means your blood is putting a lot of pressure on the walls of your veins and arteries, which can damage them over time. This also means your heart has to work hard to pump blood around your body.

A blood pressure reading has two measurements:

- Systolic blood pressure, which is how much pressure your blood exerts against artery walls when your heart beats
- Diastolic blood pressure, which is how much pressure your blood exerts against artery walls while your heart is resting between beats

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### Blood pressure readings fall into five different groups:

Blood pressure category	Top number: Systolic		Bottom number: Diastolic
Normal	Less than 120 mmHg	and	Less than 80 mmHg
Elevated	120-129 mmHg	and	Less than 80 mmHg
High blood pressure: Hypertension Stage 1	130-139 mmHg	or	80-89 mmHg
High blood pressure: Hypertension Stage 2	140 mmHg or higher	or	90 mmHg or higher

# What can I do to lower my blood pressure?

Some people might need to take medication (more on that later). But lifestyle changes can also make a major difference.

Here are 6 things to try:

## Get active

Regular exercise has a ton of health benefits—and one of them is decreasing your blood pressure. Getting active helps in two ways:

- **Strengthening your heart.** “Exercise makes the heart stronger and more efficient at pumping blood,” explains Maven Family Medicine Physician Danielle Dang. “When the heart is stronger, it can pump the same amount of blood with less effort, which lowers blood pressure.”
- **Helping with weight loss.** “Being overweight is a risk factor for developing high blood pressure,” Dang says. “Regular exercise helps you maintain a healthy weight, which decreases the amount of work the heart has to do. That can decrease blood pressure.”

Working with injuries, or don't know where to start? [Meet with a Maven Physical Support Coach](#) for advice.

## Prioritize heart-healthy foods

Take a look at what you usually eat over the course of a day or a week, and think about ways to make room for heart-healthy foods.

### Try to include these in your weekly plate:

- **Fish:** Look for fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, especially salmon, halibut, tuna, and trout. According to the Cleveland Clinic, omega-3 fatty acids are great for cardiovascular health—and can help lower high blood pressure.
- **Nuts and seeds:** These are packed with alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), like walnuts, flax seeds, pumpkin seeds, chia seeds, and hemp seeds. ALA is a type of omega-3 fatty acid found in plants.

- **Oats and whole grains:** These can lower your cholesterol levels. Cholesterol—a waxy substance found in your blood—can play a role in high blood pressure. Oats and whole grains help increase “good” cholesterol and lower “bad” cholesterol.
- **Berries:** Try berries that contain fiber and antioxidants, like blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries. Antioxidants can help fight cell damage, and soluble fiber can lower your cholesterol levels.
- **Beans and legumes:** Including lentils, chickpeas, peas, black beans, and kidney beans. As the American Heart Association explains, beans and legumes are high in protein, fiber, and minerals—and low in cholesterol and saturated fat. Try swapping out some animal proteins like steak for beans and legumes.

## Cut down on alcohol — or cut it out completely

Drinking three or more alcoholic drinks in one sitting can raise your blood pressure temporarily. And regular drinking sessions can increase your blood pressure in the long term. Try to eliminate binge drinking (for men, the CDC defines this as 5 or more drinks within 2 hours) or heavy alcohol use (more than 4 drinks in a day). If you need help cutting back on alcohol, reach out to your Maven Care Advocate for resources and support.

## Quit smoking or vaping

Tobacco contains nicotine, a drug that has many different effects on the body. Nicotine use can raise your blood pressure, increase your risk of having a heart attack or stroke, and increase your risk of getting cancer.



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## Get more sleep

Did you know that a lack of sleep is linked to high blood pressure? If you regularly get less than 6 hours of high-quality shuteye per night, it could be affecting your health. Most adults need at least 7 hours of sleep per night.

### You can try getting more sleep or better sleep by:

- Going to bed at the same time every night, and waking up at the same time every morning
- Going outside in the morning to get some natural light, and avoiding artificial light before bedtime (especially blue light from electronic screens)
- Making your bedroom a peaceful space that is cool, quiet, and dark
- Staying active during the day so you're tired at night

## Take a look at your body weight

People who are overweight or obese are more likely to have high blood pressure. You can check in with your in-person provider about your weight, and get their support to make a realistic, supportive plan for weight loss, if that's something you'd like to try.

## Do I need to take medication for high blood pressure?

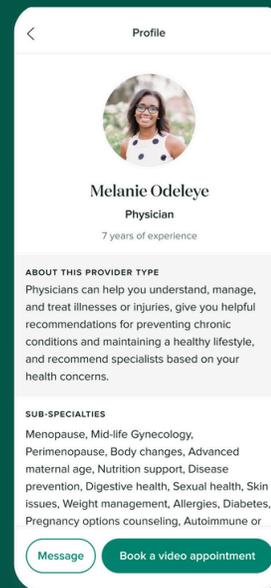
The short answer: It depends on how high your blood pressure is, but most people won't go straight to medication. "Usually, we try lifestyle modifications alone as a first step," says Dang. "We'll monitor you for a few months, then re-check your blood pressure. If it goes down to normal levels, we'll continue with lifestyle changes. If not, we'll consider starting medication." Everyone is different, so you can work with your in-person provider to make a plan to lower your blood pressure that works for you and your lifestyle.

## The bottom line

High blood pressure is a common condition, and it can get pretty serious. **But there are plenty of things you can do or try to improve your heart health—and we're here to help! Reach out to a Maven Care Advocate any time for help meeting your health goals.**

### Sources:

- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Cleveland Clinic](#)
- [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#)
- [American Heart Association](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)



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