

High Blood Pressure Treatment: *Decision Guide*

If you've been diagnosed with high blood pressure, it's important to control it as soon as possible. This decision guide can help you choose the best way for you to get started.

What are my options?

If your blood pressure is high, your doctor may recommend two options to help control it:

- **Begin with lifestyle change alone for 3 months.**

If you're able to bring your blood pressure into control, you can continue this plan as long as your blood pressure remains in control. If your blood pressure is not controlled with lifestyle change alone, you will need to add medicines.

Read the rest of this handout to learn about the lifestyle changes you would need to make.

- **Begin making lifestyle changes and taking blood pressure medicine at the same time.**

This is the most common way to start.

Depending on your situation, either of these options can be a good choice.

How often will I need to see my healthcare provider?

No matter which option you choose, your follow-up plan will be the same:

- At first, you'll need to visit with your healthcare team as often as every 2 to 4 weeks to evaluate your blood pressure.
- Once your blood pressure is in control, you'll need to check it 1 or 2 times per month at home. Your blood pressure team will also need to check it every 3 to 6 months.

- **My follow-up appointment**

Date: _____

Time: _____

Doctor: _____

Is starting with lifestyle change alone an option for me?

Check the boxes that apply to you to find out.

Your current blood pressure	<input type="checkbox"/> Below 160/90	<input type="checkbox"/> 160/90 or above
Your health risks: Diabetes, chronic kidney disease, coronary artery disease, heart failure, or smoking	<input type="checkbox"/> No to all of these risks	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes — to even 1 of these risks
Urgency	<input type="checkbox"/> You want to try starting with lifestyle changes alone for 3 months	<input type="checkbox"/> You want to be extra sure to control your blood pressure as fast as possible
	If you check all 3 boxes above, you may be able to start with lifestyle change alone . Keep reading for more detail.	If you check any of the boxes above, you should start lifestyle change and medicine at the same time.

Lifestyle changes to treat high blood pressure

Your everyday lifestyle habits play a big role in your blood pressure — and you are in control of your habits. The habits listed below are proven to help lower blood pressure. Read each one and consider where you are now in relation to making a change.

1. Eat less sodium (salt)

- **What changes would I need to make?**
 - Read food labels to find out how much sodium you're getting. Most sodium comes from pre-packaged foods like soup, soda, crackers, and bread.
 - Have no more than 2400 mg of sodium per day. Having as little as 1500 mg sodium per day can lower blood pressure even more.
 - If you cannot reduce sodium that much, then reduce sodium intake by at least 1000 mg per day from what you're eating now.
- **What resources could help?**
 - See the Intermountain fact sheet [Sodium-restricted Daily Eating Plan](#).
 - Meet with a registered dietitian for ideas on how to reduce sodium in the foods you eat.

Which of these describes you best?

- I already get less than 2400 mg of sodium per day.
- I'm not ready or able to reduce sodium in my diet right now.
- I'm ready and able to start reducing sodium in my diet now.

2. Eat a heart-healthy diet

- **What changes would I need to make?**
 - Eat MORE of these: fruits and vegetables, whole grains, unsaturated fats and oils (such as olive or canola oil), lean proteins, and low-fat dairy.
 - Eat LESS of these: saturated fats and sugar (such as fried foods and sweets).
- **What resources could help?**
 - Ask for the Intermountain [High Blood Pressure and the DASH Diet](#) fact sheet, and the [Nutrition for a Healthy Heart](#) booklet.
 - Visit a registered dietitian for nutrition counseling. Some insurance providers cover several visits a year at no cost.

Which of these describes you best?

- I'm already eating a heart-healthy diet.
- I'm not ready or able to change my diet right now.
- I'm ready and able to start eating a heart-healthy diet now.

3. Limit alcohol

- **What changes would I need to make?**
 - For men, don't have more than 2 drinks a day.
 - For women, don't have more than 1 drink a day.

What counts as one drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 ounce of hard liquor.

Which of these describes you best?

- I don't drink alcohol, or I already limit my alcohol as recommended.
- I'm not ready or able to limit my alcohol right now.
- I am ready and able to start limiting alcohol as recommended.

4. Be physically active every day

- **What changes would I need to make?**
 - Aim for 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity, such as a brisk walk. That's about 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.
 - If you're not able to exercise for 30 minutes a day right now, start with 10 minutes a day and build up a little at a time.
- **What resources could help?**
 - The Intermountain fact sheet [Live Well, Move More](#) explains ways to get more activity into your daily life.

Which of these describes you best?

- I already get the recommended amount of activity.
- I'm not ready or able to get more activity
- I'm ready and able to start getting more activity.

Losing weight

Losing weight is one of the best things you can do to lower your blood pressure. The lifestyle habits that lower your blood pressure will also help you lose weight.

As you start making the lifestyle changes listed here, you're already getting started on a weight-loss plan. This may be a good time to make a weight loss goal. **Losing as little as 10 pounds from your current weight is enough to start lowering your blood pressure.**

What resources could help?

Intermountain's [The Weigh to Health program](#) teaches the habits and skills needed to lose weight. Ask your healthcare provider for more information.



5. Manage stress

- **What changes would I need to make?**
 - Take steps to identify what's causing you stress.
 - Take steps to reduce or manage stress in your life.
- **What resources could help?**
 - The Intermountain fact sheet [Live Well, Stress Less](#) explains things you can do to understand your stress and manage it well. It also gives ideas for how to know when you should get help from a mental health professional.
 - Get help from a mental health professional if you need it. Don't hesitate.

Which of these describes you best?

- I'm already managing my stress well.
- I'm not ready or able to take steps that would reduce stress in my life.
- I'm ready and able to take steps that would help me better manage stress in my life.

6. Get enough sleep.

- **What changes would I need to make?**
 - Aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night.
 - Limit or eliminate screen time (TV, computer, cell phone) in the hour before bedtime.
 - If you snore and are tired during the day, ask your healthcare provider about sleep apnea.
- **What resources could help?**
 - The Intermountain fact sheet [Live Well, Sleep Well](#) give tips for getting better sleep.
 - Ask your healthcare provider if you should be checked for a sleep disorder.

Which of these describes you best?

- I already get enough sleep.
- I'm not ready or able to get more sleep right now.
- I'm ready and able to start getting more sleep.

How do I decide?

As you discuss your options with your healthcare providers:

- Remember that there's no right or wrong option. It's most important to do what's best for you and your health.
- Be honest about what lifestyle habits you feel willing and able to change right now.
- Think about your preferences and values as they relate to medicines and lifestyle habits.
- Talk with people who love and support you. People who know you well can help you think through your decision.



"My brother was told he has high blood pressure 6 years ago. He made some lifestyle changes and has been able to stay off meds. With me it was different. When I learned last fall that I had high blood pressure too, I started on meds right away. I've got so much going on in my life right now. I'm not sure I can focus on everything at once. I'll work on the lifestyle changes a little at a time."

Decision factors

Consider the boxes you checked on pages 2 and 3 of this decision guide. Then read the two lists below and consider the factors that will help you decide when to start medicines. Comparing the left and right sides may help you choose.

Reasons to choose lifestyle change ALONE

- I have identified at least 2 lifestyle changes that would help lower my blood pressure.
- I feel ready and able to make at least 2 of the lifestyle changes that would help lower my blood pressure — starting now.
- I will have support from friends and family in making these lifestyle changes.
- I know how to access resources that will help you make the recommended lifestyle changes (such as information, programs, or appointments with support people).
- I prefer to avoid taking medicines when possible.
- Other reasons:

Reasons to choose lifestyle change PLUS MEDICINE

- I already practice most of the healthy lifestyle habits and my blood pressure is still high.
- I do not feel ready or to able make at least 2 of the recommended lifestyle changes at this time.
- I want to start with medicines and work on lifestyle changes as I am able.
- Other reasons:

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