

Control your blood pressure by making healthy lifestyle choices

High blood pressure – also known as hypertension – affects nearly half of all adults in the United States. Many aren't even aware they have this condition. If you have high blood pressure, the force of the blood pushing against the artery walls is consistently too high. As a result, the heart has to work harder to pump blood.

If not properly managed and controlled, high blood pressure can lead to serious health issues such as kidney disease, eye problems and cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of death worldwide. The good news is that you can significantly lower your risk for high blood pressure by making simple lifestyle changes.

Here are some ways you can maintain a healthy lifestyle and keep your blood pressure numbers in check:

- **Get regular exercise.** To help maintain a healthy blood pressure, it's recommended you aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day.
- **Maintain a heart-healthy diet.** A balanced diet filled with fruits, vegetables, proteins, whole grains, healthy oils and low-fat dairy can help lower blood pressure.
- **Lower your salt intake.** Too much sodium can raise blood pressure in some individuals. The American Heart Association suggests no more than 2300 milligrams of sodium per day. Be sure to read food labels and check sodium levels, especially in packaged foods.
- **Moderate your alcohol consumption.** Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure and lessen the effects of certain blood pressure medications.
- **Stop smoking.** Smoking damages the lining of your blood vessels, which makes it harder for them to relax. It may also interfere with certain medications and increase your risk of heart attack or stroke.
- **Lose excess weight.** Blood pressure often increases as weight increases. Carrying too much belly fat can also lead to heart disease.
- **Manage your stress.** Long term chronic stress can cause your blood pressure to spike. Identify your stress triggers and practice coping techniques, such as deep breathing, meditating and connecting with others.
- **Get enough sleep.** When you're sleeping, your blood pressure goes down and keeps your heart and blood vessels healthy. Aim for at least seven hours of quality sleep a night.

Making these types of lifestyle choices can help you delay, reduce or even prevent the need for blood pressure medications. Since high blood pressure often has no symptoms, it's also important to monitor your blood pressure regularly and to see your doctor every year for your annual checkup.