



New Hypertension Guidelines Got Your Blood Pressure Up? Here's How to Bring It Down Naturally

By Shivam Joshi, MD
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As scary as it sounds, half of U.S. adults now have high blood pressure, and more will have it as they age. Last November, the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology released new [guidelines](#) on high blood pressure, or hypertension, stating that the cutoff for diagnosis is now 130/80. (Previously, the cutoff was 140/90.)

What's new—and what has everyone in a panic—is that blood pressures that were previously considered normal, like 134/82, now meet the definition for high blood pressure. Under the new guidelines, even a blood pressure with the top number in the 120s is considered to be “elevated,” which means it carries a higher risk for heart disease and death.

High blood pressure is common, previously affecting 72 million Americans, but that number will now jump to 102 million under the new definition. The new target means that many millennials are now being diagnosed with a disease that they previously reserved for their parents.

Under the new guidelines, 30 percent of men and 19 percent of women under age 45 now have high blood pressure. If you don't have it, you likely will sooner or later: Nearly 90 percent of U.S. adults develop high blood pressure during their lifetimes.

The scary part is how dangerous the condition can be over time. Often described as a “silent killer,” high blood pressure doesn't always cause symptoms, which is why having your blood pressure checked is vital. Untreated high blood pressure can lead to heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, heart attack, and even death.

If you are diagnosed as having high blood pressure based on the new definition, you may not need blood pressure medications immediately. Based on the new guidelines, only another **4 million**—out of the 30 million newly diagnosed—will need medications. Whether you need medication depends on how high your blood pressure is, if you have other diseases (like kidney disease or diabetes), and your long-term [risk](#) for having complications from high blood pressure.

More importantly, basic [lifestyle](#) changes can help prevent or reverse high blood pressure for many people. The most important changes to make include the following:

- **Lose weight.** Every [kilogram](#) of body weight you lose can reduce your blood pressure by one point. (A kilogram is about 2.2 pounds.)
- **Exercise regularly.** Aim for 90 to 150 minutes of exercise per week. [Aerobic](#) exercise appears to have the largest impact.
- **Limit alcohol.** Avoid drinking more than two drinks daily for men and one drink daily for women.
- **Limit salt.** Avoid adding salt to foods and eating processed foods, which can also be high in sodium. (Be sure to read nutrition [labels](#).)
- **Eat more plants.** Plants are naturally high in [potassium](#) (which lowers blood pressure), high in fiber, and low in salt. [Animal-based](#) foods like dairy and meat raise blood pressure by [comparison](#).

These interventions can be [effective](#) depending on the magnitude of the lifestyle change. In one [study](#), 76 percent of participants who followed a vegan diet for one year were able to discontinue or drastically reduce their medications. However, adhering to these seemingly simple changes can be difficult.

Nevertheless, many of these “lifestyle interventions” are [routine](#) for traditional societies that generally have low rates of hypertension. High blood pressure is not a natural part of the human aging process. For example, people in rural [China](#) and rural [Africa](#) do not have age-related increases in blood pressure, although this is rapidly changing as Western habits percolate globally.

(continued)

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Immigrants to Western countries develop an increased risk of high blood pressure after arriving, which only continues to rise as more **time** is spent in the West. This pattern is thought to be caused by adopting a Western diet and decreasing physical activity. Changes in lifestyle can undoubtedly raise—or lower—your blood pressure.

The latest guidelines might raise your blood pressure, but they might also spur you to be healthier. Even though statistics say you will probably develop high blood pressure during your lifetime, it doesn't necessarily have to be that way.