

Blood Pressure: How to Lower It

Manage Weight

According to the National Institutes of Health, excess body weight is correlated closely with high blood pressure, and a weight reduction program can be very beneficial for lowering blood pressure and improving the efficacy of antihypertensive medications. Research has shown that weight reduction, even as little as 10 pounds, reduces the blood pressure of overweight persons with hypertension.

Weight

Losing just a few extra pounds can help lower your blood pressure. Keeping your weight under control can also help you feel better, be more able to exercise, and reduce your chance of having a heart attack.

For some people - those with less severe high blood pressure - losing weight may be all that's needed to control their hypertension. For others, losing weight may reduce the medication they need to take for their high blood pressure. Two things count about weight: how much and where.

How Much

Research has shown that weight reduction, even as little as 10 pounds reduces blood pressure in a large percentage of overweight persons with hypertension, makes blood pressure medications more effective and reduces cardiovascular risk factors.

Where

Extra pounds are bad enough, but it also matters where those pounds are stored. If they are around your belly, you are "apple shaped." If they are around your hips and thighs, you are "pear shaped." Where you store weight is for the most part inherited from your parents, just like the color of your eyes or hair, although men tend to be "apple shaped," and women "pear shaped." If you are apple shaped, you are at a greater risk for heart disease. But whether you are an "apple" or a "pear," you should take steps to lose extra pounds.

How to Lose Weight

Eat fewer calories than you burn. Don't try to see how fast you can lose weight. It's best to do it slowly. "Fad" diets do not work over the long haul because they cannot be followed for life. When people go back to their old way of eating, they usually regain the weight, leading the cycles of weight loss and gain.

Try to lose about ½ to 1 pound a week. This isn't as hard as it sounds. One pound equals 3,500 calories—or seven times 500. So if you cut 500 calories a day by eating less and being more active, you should lose about 1 pound in a week.

Here's an example. In one day:

- Replace a chocolate candy bar at lunch with a small apple.
- Have a piece of baked chicken instead of fried chicken at dinner.
- Then take a 15-minute brisk walk after lunch and dinner instead of lingering at the table.

You can cut your calories by 500 that day. Making these kinds of changes every day will help you to lose about a pound a week.