

HYPERTENSION

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is a significant risk factor for stroke, coronary heart disease and renal failure. Individuals with normal blood pressure at age 55 have a 90% risk of developing hypertension.

BLOOD PRESSURE GUIDELINES:

Normal: 120/80

Borderline: 130/90

Pre-hypertension: 120–139/80–90. This requires lifestyle modifications; individuals with pre-hypertension are twice as likely to develop hypertension.

Stage 1 hypertension: 140–159/90–99. Medication is required.

Stage 2 hypertension: >160/>100. Multiple medications are required.

Urgent/crisis level hypertension: 210–240/120–130. Go to emergency room or doctor.

It is important to check your blood pressure regularly if it is borderline or higher. If you are taking a holistic approach to lowering your blood pressure without taking medications, it is strongly suggested that you use a blood pressure monitor at home several days per week, and if it rises to stage one, see your doctor for medical intervention.

FACTORS INCREASING THE RISK OF HYPERTENSION include obesity, high cholesterol, sedentary lifestyle, high salt consumption, more than two alcoholic beverages per day, smoking, diabetes and stress. It may also co-exist with, or as a result of, pregnancy, kidney disease, thyroid disorders, adrenal gland disease and abnormalities of the blood vessels.

MANAGING BORDERLINE AND PRE-HYPERTENSION HOLISTICALLY:

Acupuncture helps to reduce blood pressure when received regularly.

Stress-reduction techniques such as yoga, exercise, meditation and a healthy diet are effective ways to naturally reduce your blood pressure. Combining these as much as possible will yield the best possible results.

It is essential for you to **establish a normal weight and maintain it**. If you are overweight or obese and would like some helpful suggestions and information on weight control, see my “weighty issues” handout.

Improve your diet by reducing the consumption of meat, alcohol, salt, dairy and foods containing saturated fat. The bulk of your diet should consist of vegetables, fruits, grains, beans, healthy fats, nuts, lean meat and fish. Vegan diets and the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet are healthful ways to reduce blood pressure, weight, cholesterol and blood sugar, but it is suggested that you see a registered dietician, nutritionist or holistic health counselor for advice to ensure that your diet is healthy and tailored to your needs.

Exercise regularly: at least 30 minutes at a time, 3 days per week.

Hibiscus tea: drinking a few cups of hibiscus tea daily may help lower blood pressure, researchers report in *The Journal of Nutrition*. Hibiscus has a mild diuretic property.