

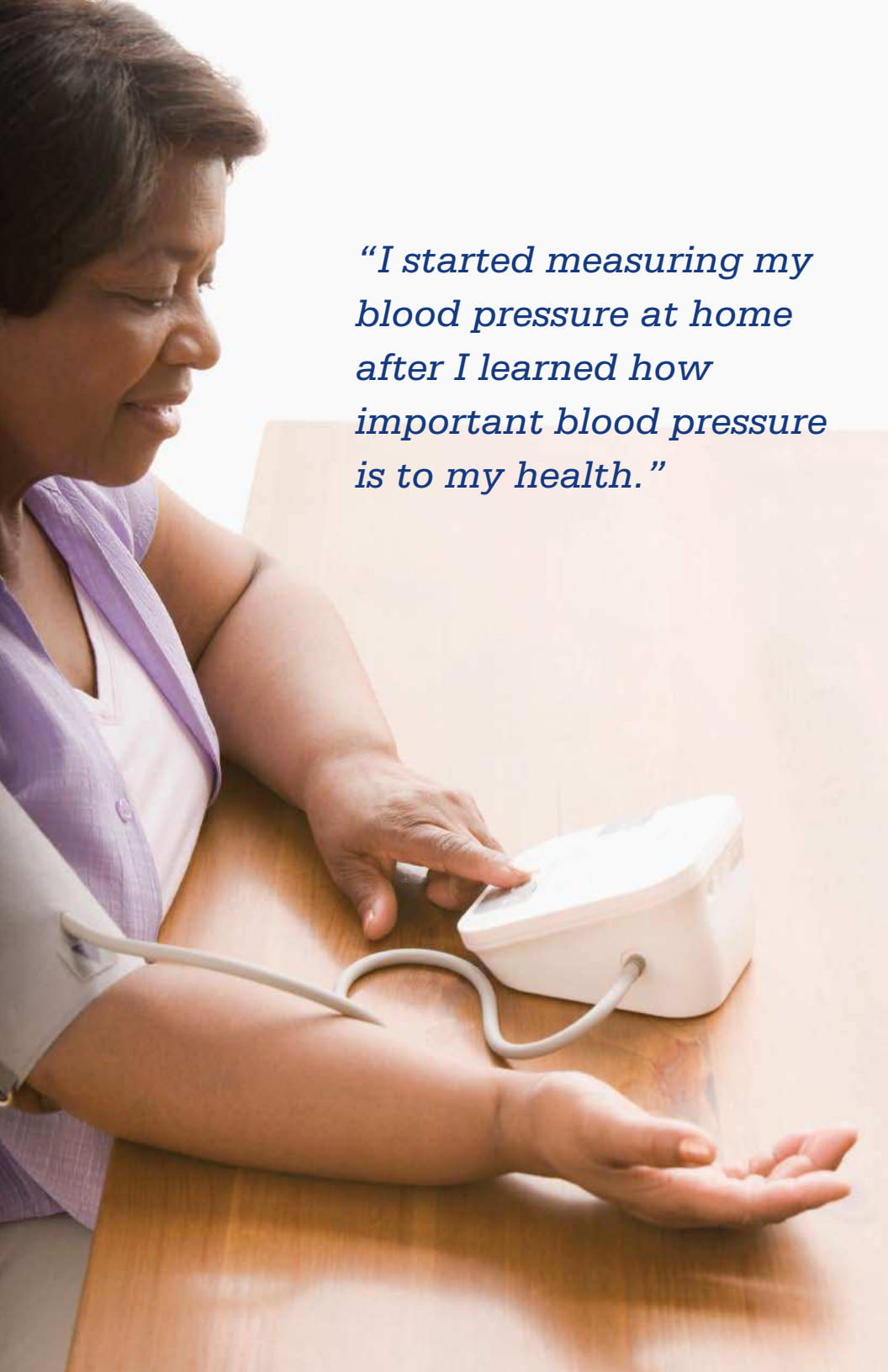
# Blood Pressure and Your Health



## **YOUR GUIDE TO:**

- ♥ **Blood pressure basics**
- ♥ **The danger of high blood pressure**
- ♥ **Steps to avoid or lower high blood pressure**



A woman with short dark hair, wearing a purple cardigan over a light pink top, is seated at a wooden table. She is looking down at a white home blood pressure monitor. Her left arm is resting on the table, and a white blood pressure cuff is wrapped around her upper arm. Her right hand is resting on the table, with her index finger touching the top of the blood pressure monitor. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

*“I started measuring my blood pressure at home after I learned how important blood pressure is to my health.”*



### What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood moving through your arteries. Arteries are the blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to the rest of your body.

#### In This Guide You Will Find:

- ♥ Blood pressure basics
- ♥ What can lead to high blood pressure?
- ♥ Do you have high blood pressure?
- ♥ Are you taking medicine for high blood pressure?
- ♥ Everyday steps for healthy blood pressure

### What do blood pressure numbers measure?

Blood pressure is measured with 2 numbers. An example is shown below.

**120**  
**80**

The top number measures the force of blood in your arteries when your heart contracts (beats). This is called *systolic* (sis-TA-lik) *pressure*.

The bottom number measures the force of blood in your arteries while your heart is relaxed (filling with blood between beats). This is called *diastolic* (die-a-STAH-lik) *pressure*.

### What is a “good” blood pressure reading?

Blood pressure lower than or equal to 120/80 is ideal.

For people with diabetes or kidney disease, blood pressure lower than 130/80 is good. Lower than 120/80 is ideal.





### What is *high* blood pressure?

High blood pressure is when your blood pressure is usually higher than it should be. It is also called *hypertension*. It's like a car tire with too much air in it. If the tire pressure is not lowered, there is risk for tire damage. If your high blood pressure is not lowered, there is risk for damage to your eyes, brain, heart, blood vessels, and kidneys.

### Blood pressure measures and what they mean

Type of blood pressure	Measure (mm Hg)	What the measure means for you
<b>Normal</b>	Less than 120/80 Talk with your doctor if you have diabetes or kidney disease.	Even a small rise in either number increases risk for heart disease and stroke.
<b>Prehypertension</b>	120/80 - 140/90	May lead to higher blood pressure. Talk with your doctor about steps you can take to lower your blood pressure.
<b>High blood pressure (hypertension)</b>	140/90 and higher	Needs treatment. See your doctor if blood pressure is always high.

### It is important to check your blood pressure

High blood pressure has no symptoms. It is considered a silent condition. Over time, it can damage your heart and other organs. Talk with your doctor about how often to have your blood pressure checked.



### Are you at risk for having high blood pressure?

This list can help you know if you are at risk for high blood pressure. Put a checkmark next to the statements that apply to you:

- ☐ I am older than 50 years
- ☐ I am overweight or obese
- ☐ I smoke
- ☐ I have diabetes
- ☐ I have kidney disease
- ☐ I am African American
- ☐ I am Hispanic or Latino/Latina
- ☐ I am a man who drinks more than 1 ounce of alcohol per day
- ☐ I am a woman who drinks more than half an ounce of alcohol per day
- ☐ A member of my family (mother, father, or other) has high blood pressure

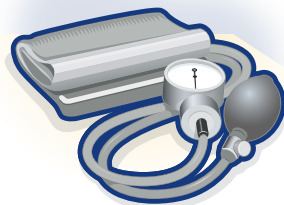
The more checkmarks you made, the greater the chance that you may have high blood pressure now or in the future. **Talk with your doctor about steps you can take to avoid or control high blood pressure.** Some of these steps are listed on page 7.



## DO YOU HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

### Try these action steps for controlling high blood pressure

- ♥ **Go to your doctor or health clinic for a checkup, which includes a blood pressure reading.** Make and keep your appointments
- ♥ **Work closely with your healthcare team.** Many doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals can help you manage your blood pressure
- ♥ **Check your blood pressure regularly at home.** Record your readings and share them with your doctor. See page 8 for how to take your blood pressure at home



High blood pressure can be controlled with medicine and lifestyle changes. Along with the steps above, see page 7 for other steps you can take every day.

### High blood pressure can cause a stroke

A stroke happens when a blood vessel leaks or is blocked by a clot. Then part of the brain does not get enough oxygen. This can cause brain damage, which may be permanent and life changing. Many effects from a stroke can be successfully treated. **Lowering blood pressure can help prevent strokes.**



### If you are just starting medicine for high blood pressure

Your doctor may prescribe 1 or more blood pressure medicines for you.

There are many types of blood pressure medicines. Some remove extra fluid and salt from the body to lower blood pressure. Others slow down the heartbeat and widen blood vessels. Talk with your doctor to learn about the kinds of medicine you are taking.



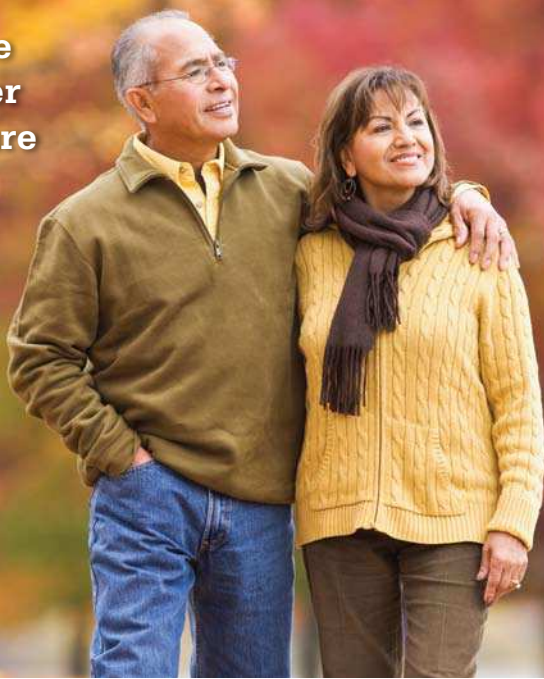
#### It is important to know that:

- ♥ You must take your medicine every day as directed by your doctor
- ♥ Even if you don't feel like the medicine is working, it is
- ♥ If you have uncomfortable side effects, continue taking your medicine. Talk with your doctor about managing side effects
- ♥ Sometimes medicine can be costly. Talk with your doctor about medicine that fits your budget





**A healthy lifestyle  
can help you lower  
your blood pressure**



### **If you are already taking medicine for high blood pressure**

About half of people with high blood pressure take 2 or more medicines to control their blood pressure.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take and the time of day you take them.

It is important that you take your blood pressure medicine every day. If you stop taking your medicine, your blood pressure will go back up. Remember, high blood pressure raises the chance of damage to your heart.

Don't wait for signs of damage. Take the steps to take control of your high blood pressure.





## 6 steps to help control blood pressure

Here are 6 steps that can help you lower high blood pressure. They can also help you create a healthy lifestyle. For best results, try to do as many as you can.

Ask your doctor or nurse for help to make these changes. It may be easier for you to make 1 change first. Put a check next to the healthy step you plan to try.

- ☐ **1. Follow a healthy eating plan.** See page 9 for healthy eating tips.
- ☐ **2. Get to and stay at a healthy weight.** Talk with your doctor about getting to a weight that's right for you.
- ☐ **3. Eat less salt.** Read food labels to find out how much sodium (salt) you eat every day. Aim to eat less than 1500 mg of sodium per day.
- ☐ **4. Exercise.** Try to be active every day. Walk as much as you can. Every step counts!
- ☐ **5. Stop smoking.** Ask for help to quit.
- ☐ **6. Take your blood pressure at home.** Keep track of your numbers. See the next page for how to do this.

Remember, the more healthy steps you take, the better it is for your blood pressure and your health. Add others until they are all a part of your life.



### It's important to check and record your numbers

To take your blood pressure at home, you will need a home blood pressure monitor. You can buy one at your local pharmacy or department store.

Try to take your blood pressure at the same time every day. Here are some tips for getting true blood pressure measures:

#### Before taking your blood pressure:

- ♥ **Avoid smoking, caffeine, or exercise** for 30 minutes
- ♥ **Sit down and relax** for at least 5 minutes. If you don't, your blood pressure result may not be true
- ♥ **Use a properly sized cuff.** A cuff that fits incorrectly may also give a measure that is not true

#### How to take your blood pressure:

1. Sit down with both feet flat on the floor and your back up against the chair.
2. Wrap the blood pressure monitor cuff above your elbow.
3. Rest your arm on a table. Your upper arm should be at heart level.
4. Don't talk while you take your blood pressure.
5. Follow the instructions that came with your monitor.
6. Take your blood pressure and write down the results. Wait a few moments, take it again, and write down the results.
7. Record the results, as directed by your doctor.

Share your results with your doctor at your next appointment.



## Take steps toward healthy eating

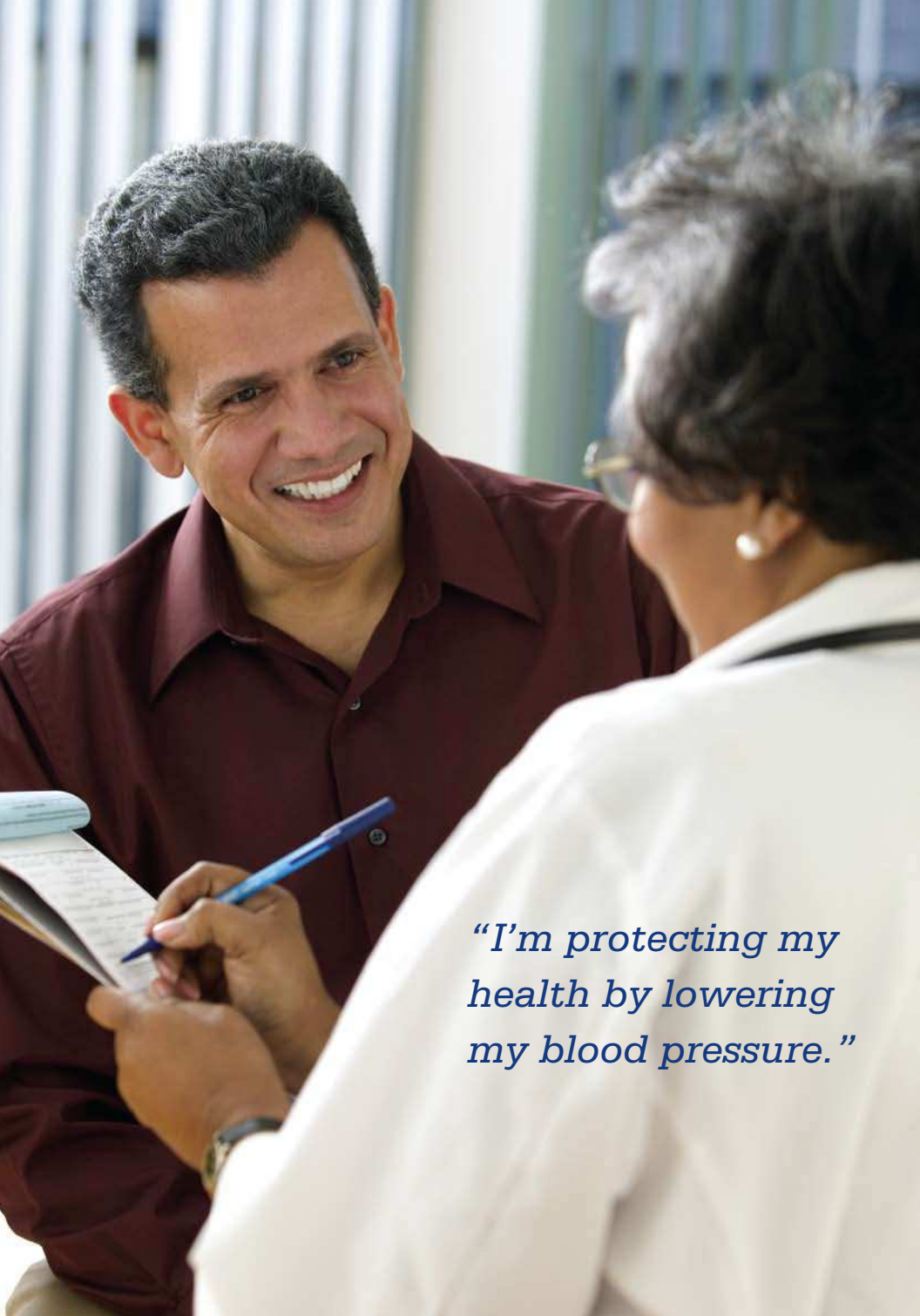
Healthy eating habits are important for controlling blood pressure. One healthy habit is using low-salt options in snacks and meals. Remember to look at food labels for sodium (salt) content. Healthy foods also provide nutrients that help lower blood pressure. See the chart below for other healthy eating tips.

## Healthy habits for everyday eating

Try to eat less often:	Try more often:
Sweetened soda or juice	Water or club soda with a wedge of lemon
Buttered and salted popcorn	Fruit, vegetable sticks, unbuttered and unsalted popcorn, or rice cakes
Sweetened whole milk yogurt	Add fruit to fat-free or low-fat yogurt
Salty snack foods	Fruits or vegetables
Canned, smoked, or processed poultry, fish, and meat	Fresh poultry, fish, and lean meat
Instant or flavored rice, pasta, and cereal mixes	Rice, pasta, and hot cereals cooked without salt

The DASH\* diet offers many tips for healthy eating. To learn how it can help you, talk with your doctor. Or visit <http://dashdiet.org>.

\*Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension.



*“I’m protecting my health by lowering my blood pressure.”*

## Questions to ask your doctor

Here are some questions you may want to ask your doctor. Bring this page with you to your next doctor appointment so that you can take notes.

### How does my blood pressure medicine work?

---

---

### Does my blood pressure medicine have side effects?

---

---

### How do I take my blood pressure at home?

---

---

### How often should I take my blood pressure at home?

---

---

Use the space below to write down other questions you may have.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Sources for more information about blood pressure

### **American Society of Hypertension (ASH)**

**(866) 696-9099**

[www.ash-us.org](http://www.ash-us.org)

Visit the ASH Web site for more information about the Hypertension Community Outreach Program.

### **American Heart Association (AHA)**

**(800) 242-8721 (AHA-USA1)**

[www.hearthub.org](http://www.hearthub.org)

Visit the AHA high blood pressure health center (<http://www.hearthub.org/hc-high-blood-pressure.htm>) for information about blood pressure and how to manage it.

### **National Heart Lung and Blood Institute**

**(301) 592-8573**

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

Visit the *Your Guide to Lowering Blood Pressure* interactive Web site (<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp>) for information about how to prevent and lower high blood pressure.



**The Society gratefully acknowledges PepsiCo, Inc. for its support of this pamphlet.**

**The Society also gratefully acknowledges Forest Pharmaceuticals, Inc., and HoMedics, Inc., for their continued support of the ASH Hypertension Community Outreach Program.**

©2010 American Society of Hypertension, Inc. All Rights Reserved.