

Healthy Living Newsletter

Keeping You Healthy & Informed

Volume 7, Issue 3

May Is High Blood Pressure Education Month

High Blood Pressure Education Month raises awareness about hypertension, often called the “silent killer” because it usually has no symptoms yet greatly increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. The goal is to encourage everyone to know their blood pressure numbers and take steps to keep them in a healthy range.

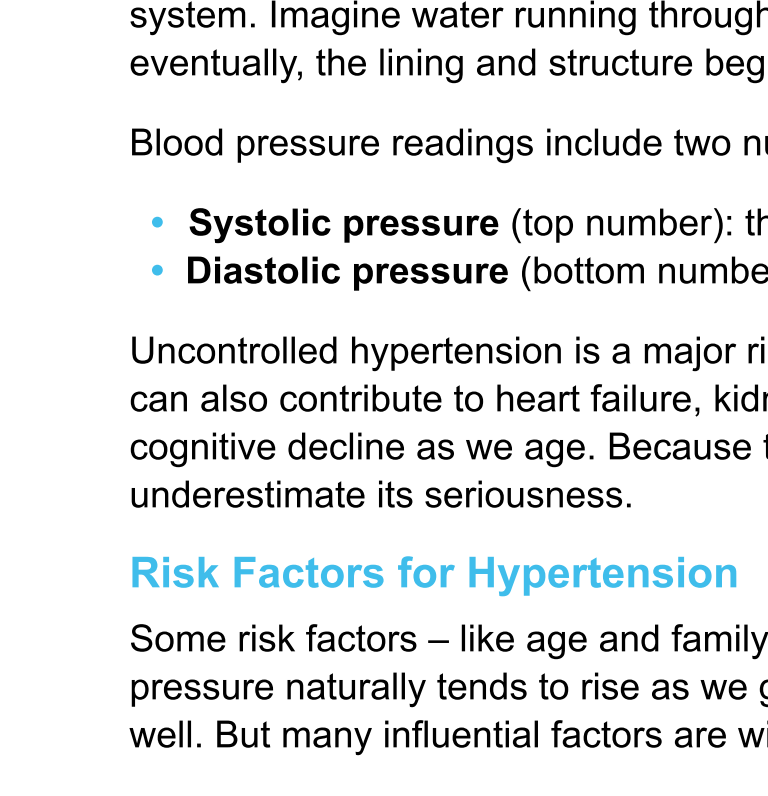
How to Observe

During May, consider the following actions:

- Get your blood pressure checked at a doctor’s office, pharmacy, or at home.
- Monitor your numbers regularly using self-measured blood pressure techniques to track progress and treatment.
- Adopt healthy habits such as reducing sodium, eating more plant-based foods, exercising, and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Share educational resources on social media using hashtags like **#BloodPressureEducationMonth** to inspire others.

Campaigns and Resources

Organizations such as the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, CDC, and American Heart Association offer toolkits, graphics, videos, and social media materials to support awareness efforts.



The Silent Threat: Why High Blood Pressure Deserves Your Attention

High blood pressure – also called hypertension – is often referred to as the “silent killer.” The nickname may sound dramatic, but it reflects a real danger: most people with high blood pressure feel completely normal. No pain. No warning signs. No obvious symptoms. Meanwhile, elevated pressure can quietly damage the heart, brain, kidneys, and blood vessels over time. There is no cure for high blood pressure, but healthy habits, regular monitoring, and taking prescribed medications can help manage it and improve quality of life. That’s what makes awareness and early management so important. There is no cure for high blood pressure, but healthy habits, regular monitoring, and taking prescribed medications can help manage it and improve quality of life.

What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. When that pressure stays too high for too long, it strains your cardiovascular system. Imagine water running through a garden hose at excessive pressure – eventually, the lining and structure begin to weaken.

Blood pressure readings include two numbers:

- **Systolic pressure** (top number): the force when your heart beats
- **Diastolic pressure** (bottom number): the force when your heart relaxes

Uncontrolled hypertension is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. It can also contribute to heart failure, kidney disease, vision problems, and even cognitive decline as we age. Because the damage builds slowly, many people underestimate its seriousness.

Risk Factors for Hypertension

Some risk factors – like age and family history – are outside our control. Blood pressure naturally tends to rise as we get older, and genetics can play a role as well. But many influential factors are within our control, including:

- Physical activity
- Weight management
- Stress levels
- Sleep quality
- Sodium intake
- Tobacco use

Understanding these factors helps you take meaningful steps toward prevention and long-term heart health.

Treatment Options

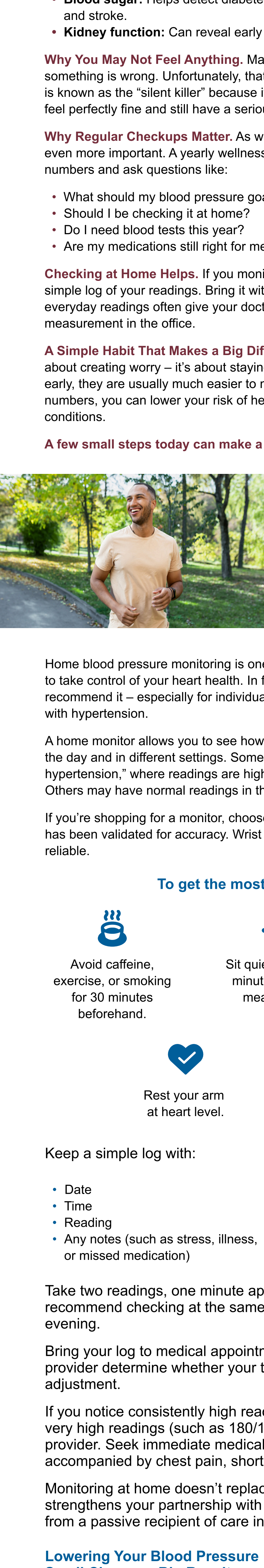
If you’ve been diagnosed with high blood pressure, treatment may include lifestyle changes, medication, or a combination of both. Plans are individualized, so your healthcare provider will tailor recommendations to your needs and any other medical conditions you may have.

If medication is prescribed, it’s important to take it exactly as directed – even when you feel fine. The goal is prevention. Managing blood pressure today helps protect you from serious complications tomorrow.

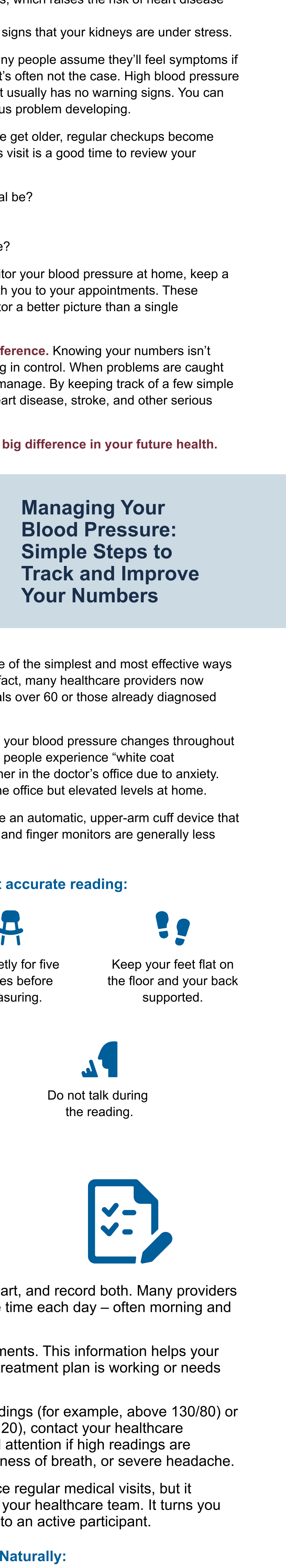
The Good News: Hypertension Is Highly Manageable

High blood pressure is one of the most treatable risk factors for heart disease. For most adults, a normal reading is below 120/80 mmHg. Readings consistently above 130/80 may indicate hypertension, but your personal target may vary depending on your overall health.

High Blood Pressure Education Month is an ideal time to schedule a check-up, review your numbers, and talk with your provider about your heart health. Hypertension may be silent – but we don’t have to ignore it.



Know Your Numbers: A Simple Step to Protect Your Heart and Brain



Taking care of your health doesn’t have to be complicated. One of the easiest and most important things you can do is simply **know your numbers**.

These numbers give you and your doctor a quick snapshot of how your heart, blood vessels, and overall health are doing. When you keep track of them, problems can often be found early—before they become serious.

Your Blood Pressure: A Key Number to Watch. Blood pressure is one of the most important numbers for your health. You’ll usually see it written like this: **120/80**. You don’t need to remember what each number means – just know whether your reading is in a healthy range.

General Guidelines:

- Normal**
Less than 120/80
- Elevated**
Top number 120–129 and bottom under 80
- High blood pressure**
130/80 or higher (over time)

If your numbers are higher than they should be, your doctor can help you decide what steps to take.

Other Important Numbers. Blood pressure is just one piece of the puzzle. Simple blood tests can tell you even more about your health:

- **Cholesterol:** Shows how much fat is in your blood. High levels can clog arteries and increase heart risk.
- **Blood sugar:** Helps detect diabetes, which raises the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **Kidney function:** Can reveal early signs that your kidneys are under stress.

Why You May Not Feel Anything. Many people assume they’ll feel symptoms if something is wrong. Unfortunately, that’s often not the case. High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer” because it usually has no warning signs. You can feel perfectly fine and still have a serious problem developing.

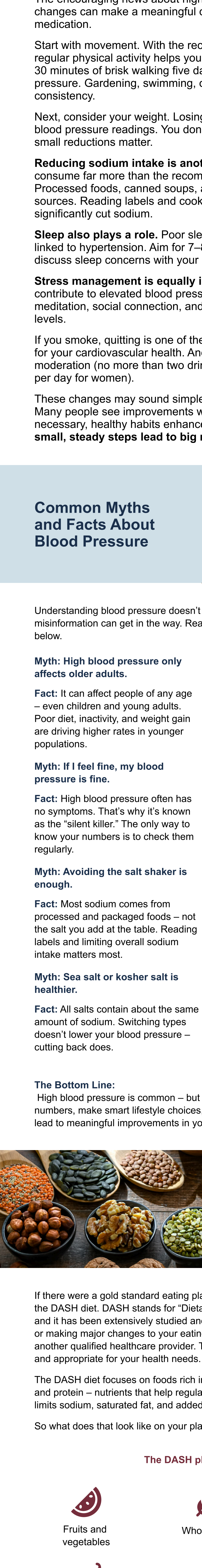
Why Regular Checkups Matter. As we get older, regular checkups become even more important. A yearly wellness visit is a good time to review your numbers and ask questions like:

- What should my blood pressure goal be?
- Should I be checking it at home?
- Do I need blood tests this year?
- Are my medications still right for me?

Checking at Home Helps. If you monitor your blood pressure at home, keep a simple log of your readings. Bring it with you to your appointments. These everyday readings often give your doctor a better picture than a single measurement in the office.

A Simple Habit That Makes a Big Difference. Knowing your numbers isn’t about creating worry – it’s about staying in control. When problems are caught early, they are usually much easier to manage. By keeping track of a few simple numbers, you can lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, and other serious conditions.

A few small steps today can make a big difference in your future health.



Managing Your Blood Pressure: Simple Steps to Track and Improve Your Numbers

Home blood pressure monitoring is one of the simplest and most effective ways to take control of your heart health. In fact, many healthcare providers now recommend it – especially for individuals over 60 or those already diagnosed with hypertension.

A home monitor allows you to see how your blood pressure changes throughout the day and in different settings. Some people experience “white coat hypertension,” where readings are higher in the doctor’s office due to anxiety. Others may have normal readings in the office but elevated levels at home.

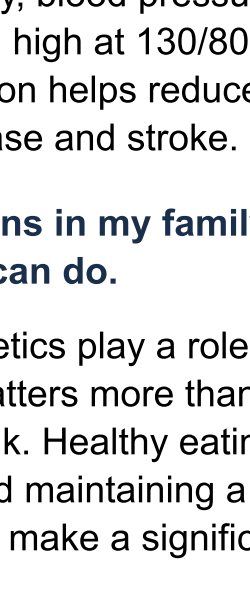
If you’re shopping for a monitor, choose an automatic, upper-arm cuff device that has been validated for accuracy. Wrist and finger monitors are generally less reliable.

To get the most accurate reading:

- Avoid caffeine, exercise, or smoking for 30 minutes beforehand.**
- Sit quietly for five minutes before measuring.**
- Keep your feet flat on the floor and your back supported.**
- Rest your arm at heart level.**
- Do not talk during the reading.**

Keep a simple log with:

- Date
- Time
- Reading
- Any notes (such as stress, illness, or missed medication)



Take two readings, one minute apart, and record both. Many providers recommend checking at the same time each day – often morning and evening.

Bring your log to medical appointments. This information helps your provider determine whether your treatment plan is working or needs adjustment.

If you notice consistently high readings (for example, above 130/80) or very high readings (such as 180/120), contact your healthcare provider. Seek immediate medical attention if high readings are accompanied by chest pain, shortness of breath, or severe headache.

Monitoring at home doesn’t replace regular medical visits, but it strengthens your partnership with your healthcare team. It turns you from a passive recipient of care into an active participant.

Lowering Your Blood Pressure Naturally: Small Changes, Big Results

The encouraging news about high blood pressure is that lifestyle changes can make a meaningful difference – sometimes as much as medication.

Start with movement. With the recommendations of your physician, regular physical activity helps your heart pump more efficiently. Even 30 minutes of brisk walking five days a week can lower blood pressure. Gardening, swimming, or dancing count too. The key is consistency.

Next, consider your weight. Losing even 5–10 pounds can improve blood pressure readings. You don’t need a dramatic transformation – small reductions matter.

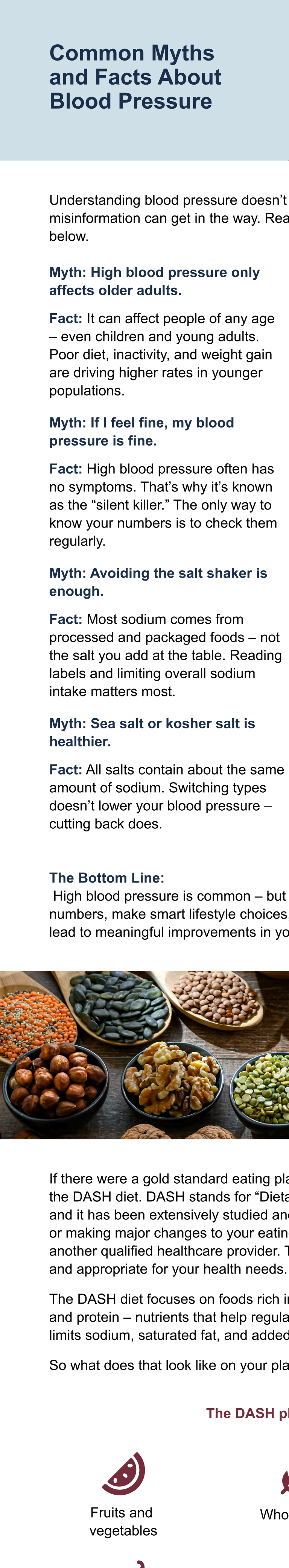
Reducing sodium intake is another powerful step. Many adults consume far more than the recommended 1,500–2,300 mg per day. Processed foods, canned soups, and restaurant meals are common sources. Reading labels and cooking at home more often can significantly cut sodium.

Sleep also plays a role. Poor sleep and untreated sleep apnea are linked to hypertension. Aim for 7–8 hours of quality sleep per night and discuss sleep concerns with your provider.

Stress management is equally important. Chronic stress can contribute to elevated blood pressure. Deep breathing, prayer or meditation, social connection, and time outdoors can help lower stress levels.

If you smoke, quitting is one of the most impactful steps you can take for your cardiovascular health. And if you drink alcohol, do so in moderation (no more than two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women).

These changes may sound simple – but together, they are powerful. Many people see improvements within weeks. Even if medication is necessary, healthy habits enhance its effectiveness. **Remember: small, steady steps lead to big results.**



Common Myths and Facts About Blood Pressure

Understanding blood pressure doesn’t have to be complicated – but misinformation can get in the way. Read each myth, then uncover the facts below.

Myth: High blood pressure only affects older adults.

Fact: It can affect people of any age – even children and young adults. Poor diet, inactivity, and weight gain are driving higher rates in younger populations.

Myth: If I feel fine, my blood pressure is fine.

Fact: High blood pressure often has no symptoms. That’s why it’s known as the “silent killer.” The only way to know your numbers is to check them regularly.

Myth: Avoiding the salt shaker is enough.

Fact: Most sodium comes from processed and packaged foods – not the salt you add at the table. Reading labels and limiting overall sodium intake matters most.

Myth: Sea salt or kosher salt is healthier.

Fact: All salts contain about the same amount of sodium. Switching types doesn’t lower your blood pressure – cutting back does.

Myth: High blood pressure starts at 140/90.

Fact: Today, blood pressure is considered high at 130/80 or above. Earlier action helps reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Myth: It runs in my family – there’s nothing I can do.

Fact: Genetics play a role, but lifestyle matters more than most people think. Healthy eating, regular activity, and maintaining a healthy weight can make a significant difference.

Myth: I can eat anything as long as I don’t add salt.

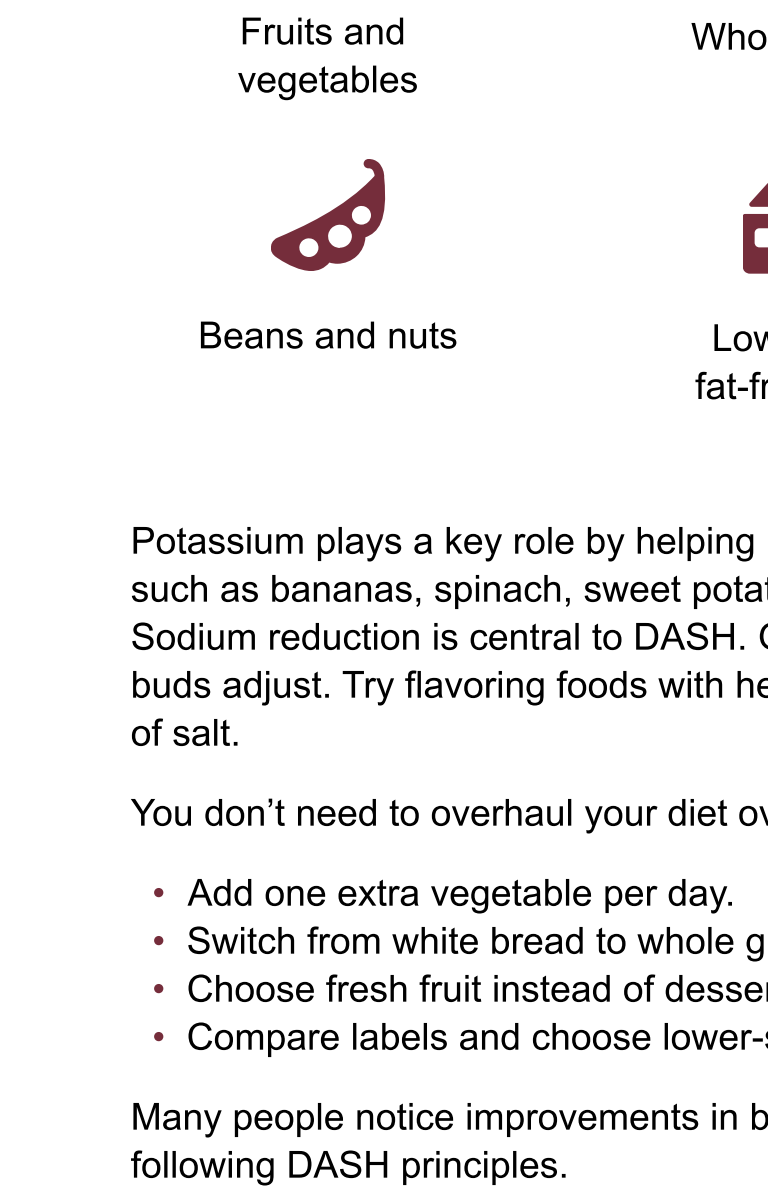
Fact: For many people, lifestyle changes can prevent or reduce the need for medication. Even if medication is needed, healthy habits make it more effective.

Myth: Medication is the only solution.

Fact: For many people, lifestyle changes can prevent or reduce the need for medication. Even if medication is needed, healthy habits make it more effective.

The Bottom Line:

High blood pressure is common – but it’s also manageable. Know your numbers, make smart lifestyle choices, and take action early. Small steps can lead to meaningful improvements in your long-term health.



Nutrition Corner: The DASH Diet Explained: A Proven Plan to Lower Blood Pressure

If there were a gold standard eating plan for lowering blood pressure, it would be the DASH diet. DASH stands for “Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension,” and it has been extensively studied and proven effective. As with any new diet, or making major changes to your eating habits, please talk with your physician or another qualified healthcare provider. They can help make sure the plan is safe and appropriate for your health needs.

The DASH diet focuses on foods rich in potassium, calcium, magnesium, fiber, and protein – nutrients that help regulate blood pressure. At the same time, it limits sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars.

So what does that look like on your plate?

The DASH plan emphasizes:

- Fruits and vegetables**
- Whole grains**
- Lean proteins such as fish and poultry**
- Beans and nuts**
- Low-fat or fat-free dairy**
- Limited red meat and sweets**

Potassium plays a key role by helping balance sodium levels in the body. Foods such as bananas, spinach, sweet potatoes, and beans are excellent sources. Sodium reduction is central to DASH. Gradually cutting back helps your taste buds adjust. Try flavoring foods with herbs, lemon juice, garlic, or vinegar instead of salt.

You don’t need to overhaul your diet overnight. Start with small steps:

- Add one extra vegetable per day.
- Switch from white bread to whole grain.
- Choose fresh fruit instead of dessert several times a week.
- Compare labels and choose lower-sodium options.

Many people notice improvements in blood pressure within just a few weeks of following DASH principles.

The best part? The DASH diet is not a short-term “diet.” It’s a sustainable way of eating that supports heart health, weight management, and overall wellness.

During High Blood Pressure Education Month, consider taking a fresh look at what’s on your plate. Your heart will thank you.

Thank you for subscribing to MedWatch’s Healthy Living newsletter! We hope you enjoyed the content and found it to be a valuable resource.