

## Knowing this could save your life!

May is **National High Blood Pressure Education Month**: time to take action to find out what your blood pressure numbers are, what they mean, and what you need to do to prevent it. Often called the silent killer, it doesn't have any symptoms but can lead to heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease.

The only way to find out if you have it is to get it checked. Although it's more common in older adults, healthfinder.gov recommends that you start checking your blood pressure every two years, beginning at age 18.

### What Is High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard the blood pushes against the walls of your arteries as it moves through your body. It's normal for blood pressure to go up and down throughout the day, but if it stays up, you have high blood pressure.

### Compare Your Blood Pressure to These Numbers:

- ▶ Normal blood pressure is lower than 120/80
- ▶ High blood pressure is 140/90 or higher
- ▶ Blood pressure that's between normal and high (for example, 130/85) is high normal blood pressure

### What You Can Do to Maintain a Healthy Blood Pressure

- ▶ Losing weight, if necessary, and maintaining a healthy weight
- ▶ Being physically active at least 30 minutes most days
- ▶ Following a healthy eating plan
- ▶ Eating less salt
- ▶ Limiting your alcohol consumption
- ▶ Managing the stress in your life

### Drilling Down: High Blood Pressure & the Dash Diet

One step that you can get started on right away is to gradually start eating more healthfully. Research has shown that a healthy eating plan called DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) can reduce your chances of developing high blood pressure AND lower your blood pressure if it's already high.

The DASH eating plan emphasizes fresh fruits and vegetables and low fat dairy products. It is moderate in total fat and low in saturated fat and cholesterol. It also includes whole grains, poultry, fish, and nuts. Plus, if you also reduce your salt intake, it works even better.

Starting on the DASH eating plan is fairly easy. It requires no special foods and has no hard-to-follow recipes. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- ▶ Make gradual changes like adding a serving of fruit or vegetables at lunch and dinner.
- ▶ Gradually increase your use of fat free and low fat dairy products to three servings a day.
- ▶ Gradually cut in half the amount of butter, margarine, or salad dressing you eat.
- ▶ If you now eat large portions of meat, cut them back by a half or third at each meal.
- ▶ Try two or more vegetarian-style (meatless) meals each week.
- ▶ Try casseroles, pasta and stir-fry dishes, which have less meat and more vegetables, grains and dry beans.
- ▶ Try fresh or dried fruits, raw vegetables, or low fat and fat free yogurt for snacks.

**Start eating more healthfully today. It can save your life!**

# Does Stress Cause High Blood Pressure?

While reducing stress might not directly lower blood pressure, using strategies to manage your stress can improve your health in other ways. Mastering stress management techniques can lead to other behavior changes—including those that reduce your blood pressure. When looking for ways to manage stress, remember that you have many options. For example:

- ▶ Simplify your schedule. If you consistently feel rushed, take a few minutes to review your calendar and to-do lists. Look for activities that take up your time but aren't very important to you. Schedule less time for these activities or eliminate them completely.
- ▶ Breathe to relax. Making a conscious effort to deepen and slow down your breathing can help you relax.
- ▶ Exercise. Yes, we've already mentioned this but physical activity is a natural stressbuster! Just be sure to get your doctor's OK before starting a new exercise program, especially if you've already been diagnosed with high blood pressure. Exercise not only reduces stress but can actually lower your systolic blood pressure by as much as 5 to 10 points.
- ▶ Try yoga and meditation. Yoga and meditation can not only strengthen your body and help you relax, but also may lower your systolic blood pressure by 5 points or more.
- ▶ Get plenty of sleep. Being sleep deprived can make your problems seem worse than they really are.
- ▶ Shift your perspective. When dealing with problems, resist the tendency to complain. Acknowledge your feelings about the situation and then focus on finding solutions.



## Recipe: Basil and Garlic Stuffed Chicken Breasts

### Ingredients

- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons snipped fresh basil
- 2 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
- 1/2 teaspoon finely shredded lemon peel
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice

### Directions

1. For the filling, combine Parmesan cheese, basil, 1 tablespoon olive oil, and garlic.
2. Place each chicken breast half between 2 pieces of plastic wrap. Using the flat side of a meat mallet, pound lightly to about 1/8-inch thickness. Remove plastic wrap. Spread cheese mixture on chicken. Fold in sides of each chicken breast; roll up, pressing edges to seal. Fasten with wooden toothpicks.
3. For sauce, in a small bowl combine lemon peel, lemon juice, and rest of olive oil; set aside.
4. On a charcoal grill, arrange medium-hot coals around a drip pan. Place chicken on the grill rack over drip pan. Cover and grill for 25 to 30 minutes or until chicken is no longer pink (170°), brushing occasionally with sauce the last 10 minutes of grilling. (For a gas grill, pre-heat grill. Reduce heat to medium. Adjust grill for indirect cooking. Grill as above.)
5. You can also bake them at 350° for about 25 minutes or until the juices run clear.

Nutrition Information per serving (makes 4 servings) 273 calories | 10 g fat | 188 mg sodium  
1 g carbohydrates | 41 g protein | 103 mg cholesterol

