

The Health Connector

Health Information for
Residents of Public Housing

Tips for Talking to Your Doctor

Taking an active role in your health care can help you get the best care possible from your doctor. One way to do this is to improve your relationship with your doctor. Good communication is an important part of this relationship. The following are some ways to help you and your doctor improve your health care together.

Talk to Your Doctor

Be sure to tell your doctor about any current and past health care issues or concerns. It's important to share any information you can, even if you're uncomfortable. Give your doctor the following information during the exam:

- Any health problems or concerns that you have.
- Your health history. You can create a "health journal" for yourself on paper or in a notebook, and bring it to your appointments.
- Personal information, including whether you are stressed or if your life is changing.
- Any medicines you are currently taking. Bring them with you or create a list of all your medicines. Include information about when and how often you take the medicine. You should also write down the strength of the medicine (for example, do you take 150 mg or 200 mg?).
- Any side effects you have from your medicine(s), especially if it makes you feel sick or if you think you may be allergic to it.
- Any vitamins or supplements you take.
- Any x-rays, tests results or medical records you have can be brought with you to the appointment.



Ask Questions

Don't be afraid to speak up. It's important for you to let your doctor know if you don't understand something. If you don't ask questions, your doctor will think you understand everything he or she has told you. The following are some tips on asking your doctor questions during the exam:

- Ask every time you don't understand something.
- If you have questions before the appointment, write them down and ask them during the exam. Be sure to write down the most important questions first to make sure they get answered.
- Tell your doctor when you need more time to talk about something. If the doctor isn't available to help, you should be able to talk to a physician assistant or a nurse. If no one else is available, see if you can schedule another appointment to continue your talk.

Take Information Home with You

Taking written or recorded information home with you can help you remember information and instructions any time you need to. Your doctor is a good source of accurate information you can trust. The following are types of information you can take home with you:

- Notes that you have taken during the appointment. It's ok for you to write down the information your doctor gives you. Sometimes it helps to bring a friend or family member with you. They can help write down the answers to your questions.
- Written instructions from your doctor.
- A tape recording. Ask your doctor if it's ok to bring a tape recorder to the appointment.
- Brochures or other educational materials. If there aren't any available, ask where you can find some.



Follow up With Your Doctor

Make sure to follow any instructions your doctor gave you during the appointment, like taking medicine, scheduling a test or scheduling an appointment with a specialist. If you're confused or if you've forgotten some information, it's ok to contact your doctor. The following are some common reasons you may need to call your doctor:

- If you have any questions after the appointment. Ask to leave a message with the doctor or speak with a nurse.
- If you start to feel worse or have problems with your medicine.
- If you had tests and haven't gotten the results.

Take Charge! High Blood Pressure (HBP)

About 1 in 3 adults in the United States has high blood pressure. HBP usually has no symptoms. You can have it for years without knowing it. During this time it can damage the heart, blood vessels, kidneys, and other parts of your body. This is why knowing your blood pressure numbers is important, even when you're feeling fine. If your blood pressure is normal, you can work with your health care team to keep it that way. If your blood pressure is too high, you need treatment to prevent damage to your body's organs.

What is High Blood Pressure?

- Blood pressure is the force of the blood against the arteries as it flows through the body. If your arteries become too narrow, your heart begins to pump harder. When your heart pumps harder to move the blood through the narrow arteries, it makes your blood pressure higher.
- Blood pressure that stays above 140/90 (140 over 90), over time, is called high blood pressure or hypertension.
- High blood pressure does not mean that a person is tense or uptight. A very relaxed person can have high blood pressure.



How is High Blood Pressure Diagnosed?

Your doctor will diagnose high blood pressure (HBP) using the results of blood pressure tests. A blood pressure test is easy and painless. This test is done at a doctor's office or clinic. Most often, you will sit or lie down with a blood pressure cuff around your arm as your doctor or nurse checks your blood pressure. If he or she doesn't tell you what your blood pressure numbers are, you should ask. These tests will be done several times to make sure the results are correct. If your numbers are high, your doctor may have you return for more tests to check your blood pressure over time. If your blood pressure is 140/90 mmHg or higher over time, your doctor will likely diagnose you with HBP. If you have diabetes or chronic kidney disease, a blood pressure of 130/80 mmHg or higher is considered HBP. The HBP ranges in children are different.

Does High Blood Pressure Have Any Symptoms?

No. High blood pressure is often called the "silent killer". This is because there are usually no symptoms. You can have HBP for years without knowing it. During this time, HBP can damage the heart, blood vessels, kidneys, and other parts of the body. Some people only learn that they have HBP after the damage has caused problems, such as coronary heart disease, stroke, or kidney failure. Only a blood pressure test can tell you if you have high blood pressure.

Who is at Risk for Getting High Blood Pressure?

- HBP can affect anyone. However, it occurs more often in African American adults than in Caucasian or Hispanic American adults.
- If you're a male older than 45 or a female older than 55, your risk for HBP is higher.
- Overweight or obese people. Overweight is on the rise in youth younger than 18 years. As a result, prehypertension and HBP also are becoming more common in this age group.
- People who have close family members with high blood pressure.
- Smokers and tobacco users.



How Can I Reduce my Risk for High Blood Pressure?

- Reduce the saturated fat in your diet. Saturated fat is a particularly unhealthy type of fat that can raise blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Reduce the salt in your diet and try not to add salt to your foods.
- Choose fruits, vegetables, grains and low-fat dairy foods (like low-fat yogurt and non-fat milk.)
- Learn to cope with and manage your stress.
- Exercise 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- Lose weight if you are overweight or obese
- If you smoke, quit.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink.



Remember: High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. Have your blood pressure checked regularly by your health care provider. The test is quick and easy.

This information was adapted from the American Kidney Fund's *High Blood Pressure and Your Kidneys* pamphlet and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's Disease & Conditions Index.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor About High Blood Pressure

Getting answers to these questions will give you important information about your health and what you can do to improve it. You may want to bring this list to your doctor's office.

1. What is my risk for heart disease?
2. What is my blood pressure? What does it mean for me, and what do I need to do about it?
3. What are my cholesterol numbers? What do they mean for me, and what do I need to do about them?
4. What are my body mass index (BMI) and waist measurement? Do they indicate that I need to lose weight for my health?
5. What is my blood sugar level? Does it mean I'm at risk for diabetes?
6. What other screening tests for heart disease do I need? How often should I return for checkups for my health?
7. For smokers: What can you do to help me quit smoking?
8. How much physical activity do I need to help protect my heart? What kinds of activities are helpful?
9. What is a heart healthy eating plan for me? Should I see a registered dietitian or qualified nutritionist to learn more about healthy eating?
10. How can I tell if I'm having a heart attack?

Source: *Your Guide to a Healthy Heart*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Reducing Salt and Sodium in Your Diet

What you choose to eat affects your chances of developing high blood pressure or hypertension. Recent studies show that blood pressure can be lowered by eating less salt, also called sodium. You can reduce your risk of high blood pressure, stroke and heart disease by getting smart about salt. Retrain your taste buds by gradually replacing added salt with herbs and spices; they will add health benefits without reducing taste and flavor.



Tips to Reduce Salt and Sodium

- Choose low or reduced sodium, or no salt added versions of foods and condiments when available.
- Choose fresh, frozen, or canned (low-sodium or no salt added) vegetables.
- Use fresh poultry, fish, and lean meat, rather than canned, smoked, or processed types.
- Choose ready to eat breakfast cereals that are lower in sodium.
- Limit cured foods (such as bacon and ham); foods packed in brine (such as pickles, pickled vegetables, olives, and sauerkraut); and condiments (such as mustard, horseradish, ketchup, and barbeque sauce). Limit even lower sodium versions of soy sauce and teriyaki sauce. Treat these condiments sparingly as you do table salt.
- Cook rice, pasta, and hot cereals without salt. Cut back on instant or flavored rice, pasta, and cereal mixes, which usually have added salt.
- When you choose “convenience” foods, select those that are lower in sodium. Cut back on frozen dinners, mixed dishes such as pizza, packaged mixes, canned soups or broths, and salad dressings, these often have a lot of sodium.
- Rinse canned foods, such as tuna and canned beans, to remove some of the sodium.
- Use spices instead of salt. In cooking and at the table, flavor foods with herbs, spices, lemon, lime, vinegar, or salt-free seasoning blends. Start by cutting salt in half.

When Eating Out

- Ask how foods are prepared. Ask that they be prepared without added salt, MSG, or salt-containing ingredients. Most restaurants are willing to accommodate requests.
- Know the terms that indicate high sodium content: pickled, cured, smoked, soy sauce, broth.
- Move the salt shaker away.
- Limit condiments, such as mustard, ketchup, pickles, and sauces with salt-containing ingredients.
- Choose fruit or vegetables, instead of salty snack foods.

Know the Label Lingo

While some foods naturally contain sodium, most of the sodium we consume is from salt added during processing or preparation. Pre-packaged items and processed food frequently contain salt and sodium for preservation and flavor. To moderate your sodium intake from processed food, read the Nutrition Facts panel on food packages. Also, look for no added salt or low sodium versions of your favorite foods.

Look for:

- **Sodium Free** – a product that contains 5 milligrams or less of sodium per serving
- **Very Low Sodium** – a product that contains 35 milligrams or less of sodium per serving
- **Low Sodium** – a product that contains 140 milligrams or less of sodium per serving
- **Reduced Sodium** – a product with the usual sodium content reduced by 25 percent
- **No Added Salt/Unsalted** – a product with no salt added during processing; however, the product may still contain sodium

Food for Thought

The key to reducing salt intake is making wise food choices. Only a small amount of salt that we consume comes from salt added at the table, and only small amounts of sodium occur naturally in food. Processed foods account for most of the salt and sodium Americans consume. So, be sure to read food labels and choose products lower in sodium.

This information was adapted from the American Dietetic Association’s Nutrition Fact Sheet and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) DASH eating plan.

High Blood Pressure Word Puzzle

This word puzzle contains some words from the high blood pressure article. Let’s see how many you can find.

S I L E N T K I L L E R T X S Q O
R S Y E N D I K V Z Z A F I U P R
L N X Q V V D M M E S F A A I S S
E N O T C E O S E M T R M P U I T
I O Q A S G Y T R R R I I Q O O R
H I N W N E V I U Y O C L E S A E
Q S B B O T Q U S C K A Y M M K S
J N Z H V A P R S R E N H C O D S
Y E J N E B N F E R W A I D K S W
U T Y M R L T W R A G M S L I E T
D R G G W E R Z P R Z E T I N S C
V E A H E S A Y D T R R O R G I F
L P V P I T E E O E Y I R E G C K
T Y C B G O H I O R O C Y G I R J
L H S U H A J Q L I H A W T V E L

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| AFRICAN AMERICANS | KIDNEYS |
| ARTERIES | OVERWEIGHT |
| BLOOD PRESSURE | SALT |
| EXERCISE | SILENT KILLER |
| FAMILY HISTORY | SMOKING |
| FRUITS | STRESS |
| HEART | STROKE |
| HYPERTENSION | VEGETABLES |

Eczema: An Everyday Common Concern

Childhood eczema is a common skin problem in infants and children. It affects up to 10% of children under 5 years of age. This is a general guide to help you understand your child's eczema, how it can be treated, and ways that you and your family can cope with it.

Basic Facts:

- Eczema is inflammation of the skin. The term eczema is broadly applied to a range of persistent skin conditions. These include dryness and recurring skin rashes that are characterized by one or more of these symptoms: redness, skin edema (swelling), itching and dryness, crusting, flaking, blistering, cracking, oozing, or bleeding. Areas of temporary skin discoloration may appear and are sometimes due to healed lesions, although scarring is rare. In contrast to psoriasis, eczema is often likely to be found on the flexor aspect of joints.
- The exact cause of eczema is unknown, but usually there are other family members who have allergic conditions, such as hives, hay fever, or asthma.
- Eczema is a constant condition until the child outgrows it. It must be treated daily with medications and moisturizers.
- Most children get better as they get older. Sometimes eczema continues through the teenage years, and occasionally into adulthood.
- There are bacteria on everyone's skin. But the skin of a child with eczema is especially sensitive to these bacteria. Often when a child scratches the skin raw, bacteria will get into the open sores and can cause an infection. The child's skin will be red and oozing in the infected area. If this happens, the doctor will prescribe an antibiotic to treat the infection. As with any medication, be sure to follow your doctor's instructions carefully.



Controlling the Itch

- Keep your child's skin moisturized to reduce the dryness and scaliness. You can do this with bathing, and by applying lotions, creams, or ointments immediately after the bath.
- Use topical anti-inflammatory medication as directed by your child's physician.
- Bathing, followed immediately by applying moisturizers, not only helps reduce skin dryness, but also lowers the level of germs in the rash area.
- Bathe the child daily, or twice a day if possible. The water will help the skin stay moisturized. The baths do not have to be lengthy. Five minutes or so is enough.
- Use lukewarm (not hot) water.
- Do not use soap unless the dirt will not come off with plain water. If you do need soap, use a mild, moisturizing, non-drying skin cleanser such as unscented Dove®. Use a small amount of the soap at the end of the bath time, just on the places where it's needed. Don't lather all over or rub with a washcloth; too much soap will make skin dryness worse, and rubbing with a washcloth can irritate the skin. Be sure to rinse thoroughly to get all the soap off.
- After bathing, don't dry the skin completely. Just pat the skin with a towel to remove excess water.
- Immediately after getting the child out of the tub, while the skin is still damp: Apply a thin layer of the anti-inflammatory medication only to areas that have the rash. (Ask your doctor how to do this.)
- Apply moisturizer all over. The moisturizer will reduce general skin dryness



What are things in my child's environment that can make the rash worse?

- Choose clothing and bedding that does not irritate the skin.
- Avoid detergents, fabric softeners, and lotions that have perfumes and dyes.
- Try to control the temperature and humidity in the house.
- Keep your child's fingernails trimmed.
- Always have enough moisturizer on hand.

What about nighttime itch attacks?

Sometimes a cold wet washcloth applied to the itching, followed by more moisturizer, will help. The doctor may also prescribe an antihistamine. An antihistamine will decrease the itching, and an antihistamine will be likely to make your child drowsy and able to sleep.

This information was adapted from the National Eczema Association for Science and Education *Power Over Eczema* Pamphlet.

Important Numbers to Remember

DIAL	PURPOSE
2-1-1	Local Referral Call Center: If you need help locating health and human services in your region, 2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember telephone number that will help to connect you with community resources available to meet your needs. <i>For example: child care, senior services, counseling, food, shelter, jobs, tax preparation & more.</i>
4-1-1	Telephone Directory Assistance: Connects you with a live person to provide phone directory information.
5-1-1	Local Transit and Traffic Information: One easy-to-remember number, regardless of your location, gives 3 choices: choice of time, choice of mode of transportation, choice of route. This number will save lives, time and money.
7-1-1	Telecommunication Relay for Hearing & Speech Impaired: A telephone relay number that connects standard (voice) telephone users with deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind and/or speech-disabled people who use text telephones (TTYs).
9-1-1	Emergency Services Dispatch: Telephone number for emergency response services.

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