

Do You Have High Blood Pressure? The New Hypertension Guidelines

By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author

When the new hypertension (high blood pressure) guidelines came out in 2017 they created quite a stir. As the guideline numbers were lowered, that meant that 30 million new Americans who didn't formerly have high blood pressure before the new guidelines did now. This caused a fair amount of controversy, some people claiming that it was the drug companies who had influenced the decision to lower the numbers. Once the new guidelines were announced, almost half of all Americans could essentially then be classified as having high blood pressure.

The American Heart Association and American College of Cardiology, along with other organizations created the 2017 guidelines based on new research that showed that people who were once considered to be prehypertensive still had increased risk of heart disease and stroke. The previous prehypertensive category was changed to hypertension: Stage 1. The purpose of the new category was to encourage treatment for high blood pressure at an earlier stage so that heart and stroke risk could be minimized.

Let's look at the guidelines and then treatment options (lifestyle changes can so often help such that other treatment is not necessary). Here are the new hypertension guidelines from the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association 2017 Task Force:



BLOOD PRESSURE GUIDELINES



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF CARDIOLOGY/AMERICAN
HEART ASSOCIATION 2017 TASK FORCE

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic Blood Pressure		Diastolic Blood Pressure
Normal	< 120 mm Hg	and	< 80 mm Hg
Elevated	120-129 mm Hg	and	< 80 mm Hg
Hypertension: Stage 1	130-139 mm Hg	or	80-89 mm Hg
Hypertension: Stage 2	≥ 140 mm Hg	or	≥ 90 mm Hg
Hypertensive Crisis (Consult your Doctor Immediately)	> 180 mm Hg	<u>and</u> or	> 120 mm Hg

Treatments for High Blood Pressure

As a Registered Dietitian I have worked with many people to help them reduce their blood pressure but because I am not a doctor, medications won't be addressed here. Your provider would discuss and prescribe any necessary medications.

Generally speaking, whether you have normal or elevated blood pressure your doctor should recommend diet and exercise. Even in the hypertension: stage 1 category the first line of defense is often diet and exercise. Studies have shown that diet and exercise can often be as effective as medications in reducing high blood pressure.

Exercise:

Regular exercise can often help lower your blood pressure. It is recommended that you do some form of movement every day for at least 30 minutes. This can be anything from walking to strength training to biking. It is preferable to build in a mix of cardiovascular (aerobic), strength training and flexibility exercises throughout the week.

Nutrition:

Making dietary changes is one of the best ways to help reduce your blood pressure. So much of the food that can help lower blood pressure is super delicious and filling. Two of the best patterns of eating for reducing blood pressure are the DASH diet and the Mediterranean Diet.

Most of the foods and herbs and spices that can help lower blood pressure are part of the Mediterranean Diet. Olive oil is eaten in copious amounts in the Mediterranean and to the surprise of many it has been shown to reduce blood pressure. Here is a short list of some of the other foods that may lower blood pressure and that are also part of the Mediterranean Diet:

Basil	Pomegranate	Beets	Fatty fishes	Pistachios	Watermelon
Garlic	Yogurt	Oatmeal	(salmon,halibut,	Dark chocolate	Beans
Cinnamon	Leafy Greens		mackerel)		

Unprocessed foods are central to the Mediterranean Diet. You will note that the diet contains many fresh herbs and spices, that can be used as a substitute for salt. The sodium in salt has been linked to high blood pressure in some people. The best part of the Mediterranean Diet is that it is very tasty and relatively easy to follow. So, no matter where you are on the blood pressure scale, what you eat and how much you move can help you tremendously.

Here are some of my favorite on-line resources for eating the Mediterranean Diet:

Oldways - Oldways is a non-profit organization that helps to promote the Mediterranean Diet. They have lots of great resources and recipes.

The Mediterranean Dish - You will find hundreds of delicious and easy recipes on the Mediterranean Dish. There are also many tutorial videos on how to eat Mediterranean.

Olive Tomato - Elena Paraventes is a Greek Dietitian who has great resources and beautiful recipes on her site. Try her authentic Greek recipes for good health!

Mediterranean Living - Mediterranean Living has authentic Mediterranean recipes from all of the Mediterranean. I am self promoting a bit here as this is my site!

The most important thing to remember here is that taking care of yourself and attending to your blood pressure through lifestyle can be fun and absolutely delicious! Happy moving and eating.

