



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## Lifestyle changes can aid in lowering blood pressure

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**Cinda Williams Chima**

**Special to The Plain Dealer**

My very high blood pressure is barely under control, despite a combination of six medications and a real effort to watch my use of salt. We're forced to eat out quite a bit. What more should I be doing - I'm worried.

T.G. Cuyahoga Falls You have plenty of company. Census Bureau statistics suggest one in three Americans has high blood pressure, up from one in four a decade ago.

The good news is that there are lifestyle changes that can work with medication to help lower your blood pressure. But be sure to talk to your doctor before changing your life.

1. Maintaining a healthy weight should be first on your health agenda. See the link below to calculate your body mass index, or BMI. If it is higher than 25, you may need to lose weight or keep from gaining more.
2. Avoiding the salt shaker is a good start, but Americans get 70 percent of their sodium from processed foods. There may be 2,000 milligrams of sodium in a can of soup, 1,000 milligrams in a tablespoon of soy sauce, 500 milligrams in a half-cup of baked beans, and 600 milligrams in a serving of boxed mac-and-cheese. (Or, 1,800 milligrams if you eat the whole box.) Ask your doctor about your sodium target and read food labels.
3. Be physically active (30 minutes most days). This can include walking, yardwork, housework, and bicycling.
4. Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and low-fat dairy products, less saturated and total fat. Fresh fruits and vegetables are naturally low in sodium, calories and fat.
5. If you drink alcohol, limit it to one drink a day for women, two drinks a day for men.

Eating out can be a problem. There are no labels to read, fruits and vegetables are scarce, and even the "diet" choice may be high in sodium. Here are some tips:

Choose plainer grilled meats, chicken and fish.

Avoid soups and sauces.

Double up on the fruits and vegetables.

Explain your needs to your server, realizing that a restaurant that prepares fresh foods is more likely to have the flexibility to meet your needs.

Cook at home more often, if you can manage it, so you have more control.

Seem complicated? Ask your doctor to refer you to a licensed dietitian, who will review your current diet and provide guidance for exercise, weight management, shopping, cooking and dining out.

## MORE ABOUT

### BLOOD PRESSURE

#### BMI Calculator:

Learn more: "Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure From the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute" can be found at <http://nhlbi%county%h%endcounty%%town%lbi%endtown%support.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm>.

Eating healthfully: "Facts About the DASH Eating Plan (Diet Approaches to Stop Hypertension)" at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp).

Consult an RD: Find a registered dietitian near you at [www.eatright.org/Public/](http://www.eatright.org/Public/).

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