

Five Things To Avoid To Help Your Heart

(NAPSA)—Managing blood pressure well can add years of life for the nearly 80 million American adults who have high blood pressure, according to the American Heart Association (AHA). But there are some things that you may not realize are sabotaging your efforts to keep your blood pressure in a healthy range.

What To Watch Out For

1. *Decongestants:* According to the AHA, people with high blood pressure should be aware that the use of decongestants may raise blood pressure. Many over-the-counter cold and flu preparations contain decongestants such as oxymetazoline, phenylephrine and pseudoephedrine, which increase blood pressure.

2. *Sleep apnea:* Some 12 million Americans have sleep apnea, according to National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute estimates. It's a potentially life-threatening sleep disorder in which tissues in the throat collapse and block the airway. The brain forces the sleeper awake enough to cough or gulp air. Pauses in breathing can contribute to severe fatigue during the day. Sleep apnea is also a risk factor for such medical problems as high blood pressure, heart failure, diabetes and stroke.

3. *Stress:* In addition to the emotional discomfort you feel when faced with a stressful situation, your body reacts by releasing stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) into the blood. These prepare the body for the "fight or flight response" by making the heart beat faster and constricting blood vessels. Constriction of blood vessels and increase in heart rate do raise blood pressure, temporarily; when the stress reaction goes away, blood pressure returns to its pre-stress level. Chronic stress can cause your body to go into high gear on and off for days or weeks at a time. And while it may not directly cause high blood pressure, chronic stress can lead to unhealthy lifestyle choices that do affect your blood pressure. It's important to handle your stress in a healthy way, especially if you already have high blood pressure.

4. *Sodium:* In some people, sodium increases blood pressure because it holds excess fluid in the body, placing an added burden on the heart. If your

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic mm Hg (upper #)	and	Diastolic mm Hg (lower #)
Normal	Less than 120		Less than 80
Prehypertension	120 – 139	or	80 – 89
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1	140 – 159	or	90 – 99
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2	160 or higher	or	100 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis (Emergency care needed)	Higher than 180	or	Higher than 110

Keeping your blood pressure within the proper range can go a long way toward keeping your heart healthy.

blood pressure is 120/80 mm Hg or above, your doctor may recommend a low-salt diet or advise you to avoid salt altogether.

5. *Not taking your medicine:* In addition to lifestyle modifications, you may need one or more types of prescription medication to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level. Keeping track of your prescribed medications can be challenging, but your heart health depends on it. Writing things down or using a health-tracking app will make managing your medications a lot easier. "Remember that you're on blood pressure-lowering medicine for a reason. Stopping, skipping, or taking them differently can increase your risk of debilitating or deadly consequences such as stroke or heart attack," said Raymond Townsend, M.D., an AHA spokesperson and director of the Hypertension Program at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. "If you think you need to do something differently, talk to your health care provider first, before making a change that could change your life."

Learn More

For more information about blood pressure management, visit the American Heart Association at www.heart.org/hbp. Bayer's Consumer Health Division, maker of Coricidin® HBP, is a sponsor of the American Heart Association's High Blood Pressure website.

Keeping your blood pressure within the proper range can go a long way toward keeping your heart healthy.