

# Six things that raise your blood pressure

February 17 2016, by Maggie Francis

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Blood pressure test at a kiosk. Credit: American Heart Association

Keeping your pressure under control can mean adding things to your life, like exercise, that help lower it. But, you may not realize that it also means avoiding things that raise your pressure. A healthy blood pressure level means you're less likely to have a heart attack or stroke.

If you or someone you care about is among the nearly 80 million U.S. adults with [high blood pressure](#), you need to be aware of these six things that can raise blood pressure, and thwart your efforts to keep it in a

healthy range.

## Salt

The American Heart Association recommends people aim to eat no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day. That level is associated with [lower blood pressure](#), which reduces the risk of heart disease and stroke. Because the average American's [sodium intake](#) is so excessive, even cutting back to 2,400 mg per day can improve blood pressure and heart health.

## Decongestants

People with high blood pressure should be aware that the use of [decongestants](#) may raise blood pressure. Many over-the-counter (OTC) cold and flu preparations contain decongestants. [Always read the labels](#) on all OTC medications. Look for warnings for those with high blood pressure and who take blood pressure medications.

## Alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. Your doctor may advise you to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink. If cutting back on alcohol is hard for you to do on your own, ask your healthcare provider about getting help. The AHA recommends that if you drink, limit it to no more than two drinks per day for men and no more than one drink per day for women.

## Hot Tubs & Saunas

People with high blood pressure should not move back and forth between cold water and [hot tubs](#) or saunas. This could cause an increase

in blood pressure.

## Weight gain

Maintaining a healthy weight has many health benefits. People who are slowly gaining weight can either gradually increase their level of physical activity (toward the equivalent of 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity), reduce caloric intake, or both, until their weight is stable. If you are overweight, losing as little as five to 10 pounds may help lower your blood pressure.

## Sitting

New research shows that just a few minutes of light activity for people who sit most of the day can lower blood pressure in those with type 2 diabetes. Taking three-minute walk breaks during an eight-hour day was linked to a 10-point drop in systolic [blood pressure](#).

Provided by American Heart Association

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