

Tips to keep blood pressure in check this holiday season

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Credit: American Heart Association

The holidays can be filled with everything from family visits, traveling and festive meals to illness and financial concerns. For the millions of American adults with high blood pressure, these changes and stressors can lead to drastic fluctuations in blood pressure that can increase risk for heart attack or stroke.

These three tips from the American Heart Association can help you keep [blood pressure](#) stable:

Be wary of decongestants

Before you use an over-the-counter cold and flu medication, check to see if it contains a decongestant. These drugs, which are used to relieve a stuffy nose, can raise blood pressure. They may also make your prescribed [blood pressure medication](#) less effective.

A decongestant should be used for only the shortest amount of time possible—and never by someone with severe or uncontrolled [high blood pressure](#). If you have a stuffy nose, consider trying nasal saline, intranasal corticosteroids or antihistamines.

Keep track of medication

Studies show that both heart attacks and strokes increase in the winter months. Jorge Plutzky, M.D., director of Preventive Cardiology at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, said this is because cold weather, sudden increases in activity, stress and unhealthy [eating habits](#) put more stress on the heart.

To decrease this risk, take your medication as prescribed by your doctor. The American Heart Association's Check. Change. Control. Tracker can help by allowing you to set up text message medication reminders, track your [blood pressure readings](#) and connect with health care providers.

Maintain healthy eating habits

It can be hard to eat healthy during a holiday season filled with rich foods and sweet treats. Also, many seasonal foods such as bread, cheeses and prepared meats are high in sodium, which can increase blood pressure. It's fine to indulge a little, but make sure to include some healthy meals, too.

Staying active can also help. If you're traveling, pack simple exercise

equipment like a jump rope or resistance band. Get your family and friends to walk to sights or restaurants nearby instead of driving. Or, instead of sitting down while catching up, consider taking a walk in a local park or on an indoor walking path.

Provided by American Heart Association

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