

Mayo Clinic Q And A: COVID-19 and high blood pressure

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DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I am a Latina woman recently diagnosed with high blood pressure. Several other members of my extended family also have high blood pressure and heart disease. I am concerned with the spikes of COVID-19 and wondering what I can do to lower my risk of getting seriously ill with COVID-19.

ANSWER: COVID-19 is concerning for all people, but research has shown that people with certain underlying health conditions, like untreated high [blood pressure](#), are at increased risk for more severe illness. Also, some racial or ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

In your case, the important first steps are taking measures to prevent COVID-19 infection and ensuring that you are managing your [blood pressure](#). The best way to protect yourself from COVID-19 is to avoid exposure. If you go out, wear a mask. Keep a distance of about 6 feet, or 2 meters, from others. Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick or has symptoms. Also, avoid large events and mass gatherings.

Follow the blood pressure treatment plan you've created with your health care provider. Left untreated, high blood pressure can lead to many other serious health conditions, including [heart disease](#), stroke and dementia.

The latest evidence shows that people with uncontrolled or untreated high blood pressure may be at higher risk of getting severely ill with

COVID-19. That increased risk is not seen when high blood pressure is appropriately managed with medication.

In addition to medication, lifestyle changes are important. Here's a reminder of the lifestyle choices that can help control high blood pressure:

Choose heart-healthy foods. Consider the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, or DASH, diet, which focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, poultry, fish and low-fat dairy foods. Review a number of heart-healthy recipes.

Decrease salt in your diet. Aim to limit sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams or less per day. However, 1,500 milligrams or less of sodium per day is ideal for most adults.

Lose weight. Losing even a little weight can reduce your blood pressure.

Get active. Regular exercise lowers blood pressure and helps with stress and weight loss.

Manage stress. When you're stressed, you may cope in unhealthy ways that can raise your blood pressure. Try managing stress in healthy ways, such as deep breathing and meditation.

Avoid or limit alcohol. Alcohol can raise blood pressure.

Quit smoking. Tobacco causes blood pressure to rise and plaque to build up quickly in your arteries.

Medication and [lifestyle changes](#) offer a powerful combination for preventing or reducing the health issues [high blood pressure](#) can cause. In light of COVID-19, always make sure that you have at least a two-

week supply of medication on hand.

Your work, where you live and who you live with can make it challenging to manage your blood pressure if you are worried about COVID-19. We've found, for instance, that living in a multigenerational home, crowded conditions and densely populated areas can make social distancing more difficult. Also, the type of work you do can contribute to your risk of getting COVID-19. There is an increased risk of exposure with some jobs that are considered essential or can't be done remotely, and involve interaction with the public.

You're encouraged to be extra-mindful to wear a mask, avoid large gatherings, follow social distancing and hand hygiene rules, continue to take your medications and limit risky activities wherever possible. Encourage family members who are considered high risk to do the same. Be sure to contact your [health care provider](#) if you find out you've been exposed to COVID-19, or begin to experience symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or other medical emergencies, including shortness of breath.

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