



# Stress Management & Blood Pressure Control

## Does stress increase blood pressure?

In today's fast-paced world filled with increasing demands, it's important to manage your stress level. Some people cope with stress by overeating or eating unhealthy foods, smoking, drinking and other activities that raise their risk for heart attack, stroke and high blood pressure.

Although stress is not a confirmed risk factor for either high blood pressure or heart disease, and has not been proven to cause heart disease, scientists continue to study how stress relates to our health. And while blood pressure may increase temporarily when you're stressed, stress has not been proven to cause chronic high blood pressure.

## How much stress is healthy?

Stress definitely affects our bodies. In addition to the emotional discomfort we feel when faced with a stressful situation, our bodies react by releasing stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) into the blood. These hormones prepare the body for the "fight or flight response" by making the heart beat faster and constricting blood vessels to get more blood to the core of the body instead of the extremities.

Constriction of blood vessels and increase in heart rate does raise blood pressure, but only temporarily; when the stress reaction goes away, blood pressure returns to its pre-stress level. This is called situational stress, and its effects are generally short-lived and disappear when the stressful event is over. Chronic (constant) stress causes our bodies to go into high gear on and off for days or weeks at a time. The links between chronic stress and blood pressure are not clear.

## Does stress increase blood pressure?

- Find ways to calm your thoughts
- Give yourself enough time to get things done
- Learn to say "no" and don't promise more than you can manage
- Recognize situations you have control over
- Practice gratitude and joy
- Learn to take deep breaths and practice meditation in stressful situations