

## Blood Pressure – Controllable Risks

You can't do a thing about some of the factors that contribute to the development of high blood pressure: Age, sex, race, and family history just can't be changed. Luckily, though, there are several risk factors that you can influence strongly, helping to get your blood pressure under control:

- **Weight** - Being overweight is a major factor in having high blood pressure. Losing excess weight is the most important step you can take in lowering high blood pressure.
- **Smoking** - Each time you smoke a cigarette, your blood pressure rises. Nicotine causes a narrowing in small blood vessels, making blood flow more difficult. Smoking increases your risk of coronary heart disease.
- **Activity** - A lack of activity results in poor cardiovascular health. Exercise strengthens your heart, lungs, and muscles, relieves stress, and helps lower blood pressure.
- **Eating** - A diet high in fat and cholesterol increases the risk for high blood pressure.
- **Stress** - Emotional stress, frustration, and feelings of futility contribute to high blood pressure. Physical tension caused by anger, especially holding anger in, can contribute to increased blood pressure.
- **Salt** - Some people are highly sensitive to sodium (mostly eaten as sodium chloride, salt). Sodium sensitivity can lead to an increase in body fluids, increasing pressure in your blood vessels. Most people consume much more sodium than they need. Recent findings suggest that potassium may be protective in blood pressure management. Bananas and other fruit are good sources of potassium.
- **Alcohol** - Regular drinking, especially heavy drinking can dramatically increase your blood pressure.
- **Oral Contraceptives** - Birth control pills can contribute to increased blood pressure in some women, especially if they also smoke.