



*Palo Alto Medical  
Foundation*

A Sutter Health Affiliate

## **South Asians and Blood Pressure**

### **What should my goal blood pressure be?**

Each individual has their own target blood pressure level based upon their risk factors. You should discuss your goal blood pressure with your doctor. Many experts agree that since South Asians are generally at a higher risk of heart attack, a reasonable goal blood pressure would be less than 130/80. This means the top number should be less than 130 and the bottom number should be less than 80. This is the same goal blood pressure recommended for diabetics.

### **How should I check my blood pressure?**

Remember that high blood pressure in most people does not cause any symptoms, which is why it is called a silent killer. Although regular visits to see your doctor are important, monitoring your blood pressure at home is the best way to keep track of your numbers. Be sure to purchase an arm cuff made by a reliable manufacturer (such as Omron or A&D). Purchase a cuff that is large enough for your upper arm. Arrange a way to share your home readings with your doctor, whether at appointments, via mail or through PAMF's personal health record, PAMFOnline.

### **Is there a link between sodium (salt) and blood pressure?**

Limiting salt is very important for South Asians with high blood pressure. Use less than 2 grams of sodium per day (2400 mgs). For reference, one teaspoon of salt contains 2,000 mgs of sodium. Read labels. Allow about 140 mg sodium per serving for low-sodium item, and up to 500 to 600 mg sodium per meal.

Use liberal amounts of herbs, spices, lemon juice and flavored vinegars to reduce salt in recipes. Indian snack foods are especially loaded with salt, so avoid these or prepare these at home with salt substitutes. Most of our sodium is coming from packages and restaurant meals. About 77 percent of dietary sodium comes from processed foods; 12 percent exists in whole, unprocessed foods; 5 percent comes from cooking; and only 6 percent from additional salt you place on food. By eating plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy and natural foods prepared from home, it is easy to stick with these guidelines.

### **What else can I do to improve my blood pressure?**

If you are overweight and have high blood pressure, losing weight is the most important step you can make toward lowering your blood pressure. Other tips are listed below.

- Exercise for 30 minutes at least five times per day.
- Eat four to five servings of fresh fruits and vegetables every day.
- Increase your intake of non-fat and low-fat dairy foods.
- Eat more fiber-rich foods and whole grains.
- Eat more potassium-rich foods such as bananas, spinach and raisins.
- Reduce your alcohol intake (one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men). One drink is defined as 4 to 5 ounces of wine or 12 ounces beer or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor.
- Reduce your caffeine intake.
- Reduce your meat intake and only eat lean meats including skinless chicken, turkey and fish. Trim fat from all meats.
- Try to manage your stress.

### **Do I need medication for my high blood pressure?**

If weight loss and dietary changes do not help reduce blood pressure, then medications may be needed. South Asians commonly visit their doctor with very high blood pressure levels. Often it is better to start medications right away rather than wait for significant weight loss, which may take several months or may not occur at all. Keep in mind that if your top number is more than 160 or your bottom number is more than 100, you will likely need at least two medications to manage your blood pressure. The only thing more dangerous than untreated high blood pressure is not using enough medication for you to reach your target blood pressure. Be sure to take your blood pressure medication every day. Again, please try to monitor your own blood pressure, and report your results to your doctor so he or she can adjust your medications as needed.

Visit [www.pamf.org/prana](http://www.pamf.org/prana) for more information on South Asian health.