



The #below120/80 Challenge

Week Three: Avoid Sodium and Alcohol



Challenge Activities:

1. Lessen your salt intake
2. Reduce your alcohol consumption
3. Continue activities from Week One and Two

Bonus Challenges:

- Reduce caffeine
- Eliminate or limit processed or refined sugar

Lessen Your Salt Intake

Review the list and decide what you will implement to go **#below120/80**. Select at least two **NEW** healthy eating choices.

Eat fresh foods

- Choose fresh fruits and vegetables over canned produce.
- Add more richly-colored green, orange and red items that are high in potassium and minerals into your diet.

Avoid processed meats

- Eliminate lunch meat, bacon, hot dogs, sausage and ham from your diet.
- Pick lean meat, like skinless turkey and chicken, when you can.
- Choose fresh or frozen poultry, or meat that hasn't been injected with a sodium-containing solution.



Choose low-sodium products

- If you do buy processed foods, choose those that are labeled "low sodium" to help limit your intake.
- Buy plain whole-grain rice and pasta instead of products that have added seasonings.

Limit use of sodium-heavy condiments, including:

- Soy sauce
- Salad dressings
- Ketchup
- Mustard
- Relish
- Most sauces and dips

Make a conscious effort to:

- Refrain from adding salt to your meals as you eat
- Leave out salt from recipes whenever possible
- Use flavorful salt substitutes, like herbs, spices and other flavorings to season foods

Reduce Alcohol Intake

If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation. Moderate drinking is generally considered to be:

- Two drinks a day for men younger than age 65
- One drink a day for men age 65 and older
- One drink a day for women of any age

Bonus Challenges:

If you already limit your sodium and alcohol intake, or just want to push yourself even more in the **#below120/80 Challenge**, try taking caffeine and sugar off the list.

Processed or refined sugar

Excessive sugar has been linked to high blood pressure. Eating more sugar increases systolic blood pressure 6.9 mm Hg points and diastolic blood pressure 5.6 mm Hg in the short term and 7.6/6.1 mm Hg if followed for more than eight weeks.

To lower your blood pressure:

- Eat more fresh fruit
- Avoid sugary beverages like soda
- Limit high-fructose syrup and white sugar

Keep in mind that change comes slowly, so do your best to stick with it daily. According to a **recent study**, a daily action like eating fruit at lunch or running for 15 minutes took an average of 66 days to become a helpful habit.



Did you know?

Having more than three drinks in one sitting temporarily increases your blood pressure. Repeated binge drinking can lead to a lasting increase.



Caffeine

Caffeine can cause a short, but dramatic increase in your blood pressure, even if you don't have high blood pressure, though it is unclear why. Some people who regularly drink caffeinated beverages have a higher average blood pressure than those that don't consume these beverages. Others who regularly drink caffeinated beverages develop a tolerance to caffeine.



Try:

- Limiting the caffeine you drink to 200 milligrams a day – or two, eight-ounce cups of brewed coffee
- Asking your Primary Care Physician (PCP) if eliminating caffeine from your diet would be a good idea for you

Continue with Week One and Two Challenges

Week One

- ✓ Record your blood pressure numbers using a tracking log or app
- ✓ Discuss results with your PCP
- ✓ Apply to your Health Action Plan

Week Two

- ✓ Track your diet and exercise routine
- ✓ Start a food journal
- ✓ Replace unhealthy eating or drinking habits with something healthier
- ✓ Incorporate more exercise
- ✓ Practice daily relaxation exercises

Keep Going and Achieve Better Results!

This three-week challenge program is designed so you can repeat the process for up to 90 days. Continue your progress and the changes you made over the past three weeks until you are #below120/80. Be sure to check in with your PCP.



Did You Complete the #below120/80 Challenge?

[Click here](#) for the #below120/80 certificate of achievement. Be sure to print and snap a photo with your certificate to post on the [MyHealth Connections](#) Facebook community!

Sources: American Heart Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Cleveland Clinic, European Journal of Social Psychology, Mayo Clinic, Psychology Today, Open Heart/British Cardiovascular Society, US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health