

Integrating Blood Pressure Screening and Intervention into Family Planning Visits



This tool explains why it is important for family planning providers to screen for high blood pressure. It also describes how to screen for and intervene around high blood pressure, and offers key health promotion messages to use with all clients.

Why is it important for family planning providers to screen all clients for high blood pressure?

Six out of 10 clients describe their family planning provider as their “usual source of care.”

Therefore, family planning visits are important opportunities to prevent, identify, and intervene around high blood pressure.

High blood pressure includes both elevated blood pressure (BP 120–129/less than 80) and hypertension (BP greater than 130/80).

Hypertension is common and serious.

Hypertension:

- Affects almost half (46%) of the U.S. adult population
- Increases risk of heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease
- Puts women at higher risk of life-threatening complications during pregnancy and in the year postpartum¹

Some groups are disproportionately affected by hypertension.²

Hypertension is:

- More likely to develop in clients with elevated blood pressure, overweight, obesity, and those who are Black
- Linked to access to the social, economic, and environmental conditions needed for health

How should family planning providers approach blood pressure intervention?

Approach blood pressure intervention as a collaboration between the care team and client.

- **Leverage both clinical and non-clinical staff** to discuss preventing and managing blood pressure with clients
- **Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services and client-centered counseling³**
- **Assess and address barriers** to following healthy living recommendations related to the social determinants of health (education alone rarely works, and hearing recommendations that a client is unable to carry out can increase stress, guilt, and frustration)

¹ American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. (2019, January). ACOG Committee Opinion No. 762: Prepregnancy Counseling. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*: 133(1), e78–e89.

² Office on Women's Health. (2018, November). *Heart disease risk factors you can control: Health conditions*.

³ Office of Minority Health. (n.d.) *National CLAS Standards*.

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Recommendations for Healthy Living

Use these key messages with all clients to encourage healthy living habits. These recommendations can help clients prevent and manage high blood pressure.



Healthy diet

- Eat a healthy diet of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, and other proteins.
- Limit sodium, saturated fats, and added sugars.
- Limit sugary foods and drinks, salty foods, saturated fats, and highly processed foods.⁴



Healthy weight

- Being overweight (BMI greater than 25) or obese (BMI greater than 30) increases risk for high blood pressure.
- Even a slight weight loss can lower high blood pressure.⁵



Physical activity

- Physical activity helps control blood pressure, weight, and stress levels.
- It's recommended that adults get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, such as brisk walking or bicycling, every week. That's about 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.
- It's recommended that adolescents get 1 hour of physical activity every day.⁶



Quitting smoking

- When you smoke, vape, or use tobacco, the nicotine can increase both blood pressure and risk of heart disease and stroke.
- If you use nicotine products, let's discuss strategies for quitting.⁷



Limiting alcohol

- Too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure.
- It's recommended that men have no more than 2 alcoholic drinks per day and women have no more than 1 alcoholic drink per day.⁸



High-quality sleep

- Regularly getting less than 6 hours of sleep or getting poor-quality sleep is associated with high blood pressure.
- If possible, aim for more than 6 hours of high-quality sleep a night.⁹

⁴ American Heart Association. (2017, August). *The American Heart Association Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations*.

⁵ American Heart Association. (2014, August). *Body Mass Index (BMI) in Adults*.

⁶ U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. (2020, November). *Final Recommendation Statement. Healthy Diet and Physical Activity for Cardiovascular Disease Prevention in Adults With Cardiovascular Risk Factors: Behavioral Counseling Interventions*.

⁷ American Heart Association. (2015, February). *How Smoking and Nicotine Damage Your Body*.

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, February). *Prevent High Blood Pressure*.

⁹ Ibid