

6 heart-health points to drive home with patients

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February is traditionally the month for lovers, but it is also American Heart Month, which aims to help patients make heart-healthy choices.

With nearly half of American adults living with high blood pressure, the AMA is offering advice to help physicians improve their patients' heart health and cut the risk of heart attack and stroke.

"In February, American Heart Month, we encourage all Americans to take control of their heart health by better understanding and monitoring their blood pressure levels and making healthy lifestyle changes that can significantly reduce their risk of serious health consequences associated with high blood pressure," said AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA.

"High blood pressure is the nation's leading risk factor for heart attack and stroke, yet an overwhelming number of U.S. adults are living with uncontrolled high blood pressure—placing them at increased risk for both conditions," said Dr. Harris. "By empowering more patients to monitor and control their blood pressure, we will continue to improve health outcomes for patients and reduce health care costs."

The AMA offers these six tips for physicians to share with patients to reduce their risk of heart attack and stroke.

1

Know blood-pressure numbers

Blood pressure variability, poor measurement technique and white-coat effect can all contribute to uncertainty about what a patient's true BP numbers are. A quick start guide from the AMA and American Heart Association (AHA) on measuring accurately can help. Physicians can also encourage patients to visit [ManageYourBP.org](https://www.manageyourbp.org) to better understand

their numbers and take necessary steps to get their high blood pressure under control.

2 **Commit to a treatment plan to manage high BP**

Work with patients to create an individualized treatment plan. This should include healthy lifestyle changes that patients can realistically stick to long-term to help maintain a lower blood pressure and rick for negative health consequences. A BP treatment algorithm is available for physicians, and the AMA and AHA have joined forces to make it easier to follow, understand and implement.

3 **Get those steps in**

Regular physical activity can help reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure. Healthy adults should get at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity, or 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity activity.

4 **Cut back on processed foods, added sodium and sugar**

Patients should consume less sodium and cut the amount of packaged, processed foods they take in—especially those foods with added sodium and sugar. Encourage patients to also eat foods rich in potassium and reduce their consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

5 **Maintain or achieve a healthy weight**

When a patient is 20 pounds or more overweight, it places them at an increased risk of developing high blood pressure. If a patient is overweight, recommend steps to lose weight, such as exercise or a heart-healthy diet. Understanding the different types of weight-loss programs and fad diets saturating the market can help physicians provide proper advice for patients.

6 **Drink alcohol in moderation**

To help patients better understand how to control high blood pressure, doctors should provide them with five lifestyle modifications they can make. This includes drinking alcohol in moderation, as defined by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. For women, that should be up to one drink per day and two drinks daily for men. Alcohol should only be consumed by adults of legal drinking age.



The AMA has developed online tools and resources created using the latest evidence-based information to support physicians to help manage their patients' high BP. These resources are available to all physicians and health systems as part of Target: BP™, a national initiative co-led by the AMA and the AHA.

Target: BP offers annual, recurring gold-level recognition for all participating sites that achieve hypertension control rates of 70 percent or higher among their adult patient population, and participation level recognition for those sites that prioritize improving BP control each year and submit data. In 2019, more than 1,100 organizations were recognized for their efforts focusing on BP control within the populations they serve.