

Hypertension Control Alliance

Talk Pressure: A Guide to Hypertension Communication



High blood pressure (hypertension) affects nearly half (48.1%) of U.S. adults, and most do not have it under control. Often called the “silent killer,” it can quietly damage the body and increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, and dementia. This guide provides research-informed messages to help professionals support people in taking steps toward blood pressure control.

The Talk Pressure Communication Framework

Effective blood pressure conversations follow a clear progression — helping patients understand the urgency, the goal, and the path forward. The **“Talk Pressure” communication framework** is informed by message testing research with more than 400 U.S. adults with hypertension. It is designed to make blood pressure control understandable and achievable by organizing key messages into five essential components:

- **Explain the Risks:** Help people understand that uncontrolled blood pressure causes serious harm over time, even when they feel fine.
- **Define Control:** Clearly state that control means keeping blood pressure below 130 over 80.
- **Give Hope:** Reinforce that control is achievable and that taking action now can prevent further damage.
- **Share the Plan:** Outline the simple, three-part plan: measure blood pressure regularly, make sustainable lifestyle changes, and take medication as prescribed.
- **Address Barriers:** Acknowledge common challenges and work with patients to adjust the plan so it fits their lives.

Note: Some people may not be familiar with the term “hypertension.” For clarity, the patient-facing messages in this guide use “high blood pressure,” with the first message explaining that the two terms mean the same thing.



Messages to Explain the Risks

Use these messages in conversations with patients to boost their blood pressure knowledge.

Explain what high blood pressure is and why it matters

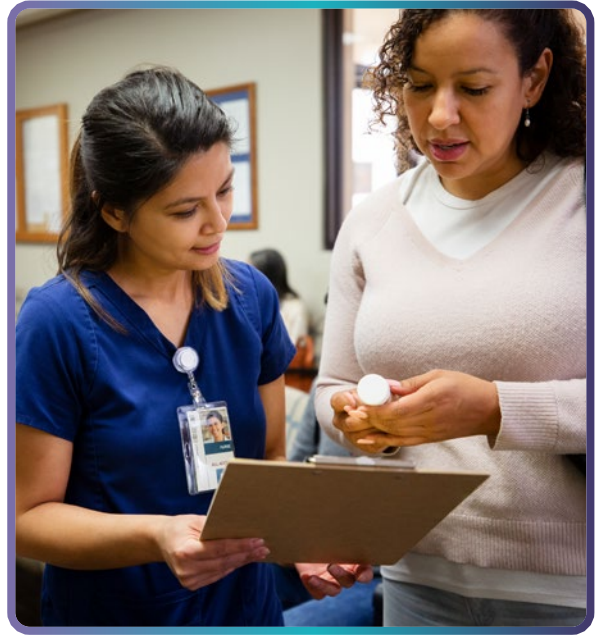
- When your blood pressure numbers are often higher than 130 over 80, it's called high blood pressure, also known as hypertension.
- High blood pressure often has no symptoms, and it doesn't go away on its own. You might feel fine even while uncontrolled high blood pressure is damaging your body in ways you can't yet see.

Describe the threat of uncontrolled blood pressure

- Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to heart attack, stroke, kidney damage, and even dementia – conditions that can steal your independence, your memories, or your life.
- But that doesn't have to happen to you. By keeping your blood pressure under 130 over 80, you can reduce your risk of these serious health problems.

Emphasize why acting sooner matters

- Every moment your blood pressure is out of control, it's doing serious harm to your body. Most people don't have any symptoms, so you may not feel the damage until it's too late to prevent life-altering health problems.



Messages to Define Control

Use these messages to clearly explain what blood pressure control means and to ensure patients understand the goal of keeping their numbers below 130 over 80.

Explain what blood pressure control means

- Control means keeping your blood pressure consistently below 130 over 80.
- If you have high blood pressure, the goal is to keep readings at or below 130 over 80 – and ideally below 120 over 80.
- The only way to know if your blood pressure is under control is to measure it with a blood pressure device. For example, you can measure your blood pressure at health care appointments, at a pharmacy, or at home.
- Blood pressure can change with things like activity, stress, caffeine, and even your posture. To see the full picture, you'll need to measure your blood pressure and record your numbers regularly – not just at health care appointments.

Messages to Give Hope

Use these messages to reinforce that blood pressure control is possible and encourage patients to take action.

Explain that control is possible

- Blood pressure control is possible. It's about finding the right plan to get below 130 over 80 with the right mix of healthy lifestyle changes and medicines that fit your life.
- The sooner you take action to control your blood pressure, the sooner you can stop more damage from happening.

Normalize that other people are working on blood pressure

- If you have high blood pressure, you're not alone. About half of U.S. adults have high blood pressure, and most are working to get it under control.
- Thousands of people are taking steps to get to blood pressure control — checking their numbers, working with health care professionals, making healthier lifestyle changes, and taking medicines as recommended.

Messages to Share the Plan

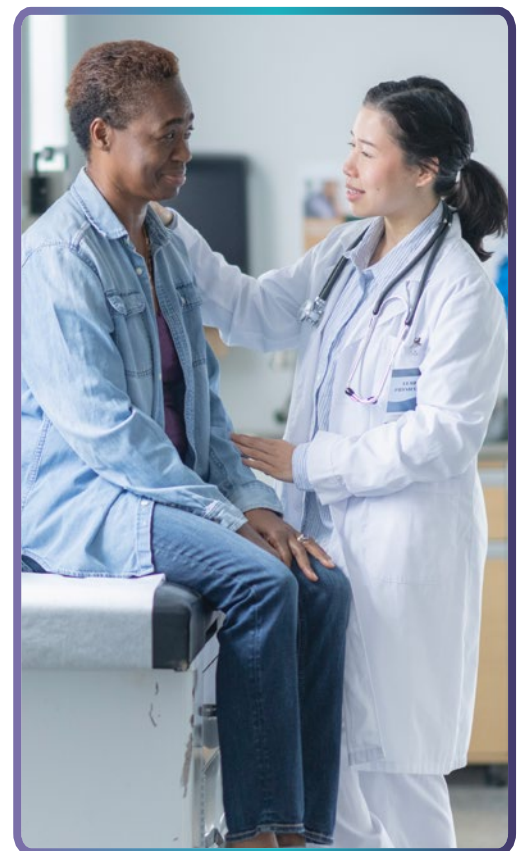
Use these messages to outline the simple, three-part plan for blood pressure control and help patients understand what to do next.

Explain the path to blood pressure control: a control plan

- Partner with a health care professional (like a doctor, nurse, or pharmacist) to create a personalized control plan.
- For most people, a complete blood pressure control plan includes 3 things:
 - **Measurement:** tracking your numbers
 - **Healthy lifestyle:** taking healthy small steps like getting physical activity, limiting salt, or managing stress
 - **Treatment:** taking blood pressure medicines as prescribed
- When recommended, medicine works along with lifestyle changes to help lower blood pressure more effectively and keep it below 130 over 80 over time.

Help people get connected to a blood pressure control plan

- Get an appointment to address concerns about blood pressure.
- Discuss a realistic path for achieving a blood pressure goal of under 130 over 80 and identify specific steps to get you to that goal.
- Schedule a follow-up appointment to check in and keep fine-tuning your plan.



Support people in sticking with their control plan

- Keep track of your blood pressure between health care visits, like by using a blood pressure device at home.
- Take small steps to make healthy lifestyle changes. No matter where you are in your journey, you can take steps that will help you achieve blood pressure control, like getting more physical activity, cutting back on salt, getting more sleep, and managing stress.
- Remember to take your blood pressure medicines every day. Linking it to your daily routines, like eating a meal or brushing your teeth, can make staying consistent easier.



Encourage regular home blood pressure tracking

- Check your blood pressure at least twice a day – morning and evening – around the same times.
- Record each reading and share the log with a health care professional so they can see how your numbers change over time.
- Patterns matter more than single readings. If you get a high reading, wait a minute or two and take it again. This can help a health care professional see if your blood pressure stays high or if it comes down quickly.

Remind people to review and adjust their control plan with a health care professional

- Talk about what your numbers mean at every visit – so you understand when your plan is working and when it might be time to make a change to stay below 130 over 80.
- Discuss any parts of your blood pressure control plan that aren't working for your life, so you can decide how to adjust the plan together.

Messages to Address Barriers

Use these messages to address common barriers and limiting beliefs about blood pressure control.

Set expectations that control takes time and flexibility

- Controlling your blood pressure doesn't mean changing your whole lifestyle overnight. It's about making steady changes that stick, like trying a new healthy habit or giving new medicines time to work.
- As your life changes, your blood pressure control plan can change too. Stay in touch with a health care professional and adjust your plan as needed, so you can stay below 130 over 80.
- Having an off day or a setback doesn't erase your progress. What matters is getting back on track and focusing on your long-term goals.

Frame medicine as an important and normal part of blood pressure control

- Healthy lifestyle changes are important, but without medicine, they're rarely enough to achieve blood pressure control. Four in five adults in the U.S. also need to take at least one medicine to get to their blood pressure goal.
- Taking medicine isn't a failure – it means you're doing everything you can to manage your blood pressure and protect your health.
- Remember that medicine isn't one-size-fits-all. A health care professional can help you find a safe, effective option that works for you.

CDC Foundation thanks these organizations and advisers who contributed to the development of this guide: Yvonne Commodore-Mensah, PhD, MHS, RN, FAAN; Yolanda Lawson, MD; National Forum for Heart Disease & Stroke Prevention; and Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association.

For more blood pressure control resources, please visit CDC Foundation's Hypertension Bites website at [MyBPCControl.org](https://www.mybpc.org).