



High Blood Pressure

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the measurement of the pressure or force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls. The heart pumps blood into the arteries (blood vessels), which carry the blood throughout the body. High blood pressure, also called hypertension, means the pressure in your arteries is above the normal range. In most cases, no one knows what causes high blood pressure.

How is blood pressure recorded?

Blood pressure is written as two numbers, such as 118/72. The first number is the systolic pressure. This is the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats and fills them with blood. The second number is the diastolic pressure. This is the pressure in the arteries when the heart rests between beats.

What is a normal blood pressure reading?

Type of blood pressure reading	Normal blood pressure	Prehypertension	Stage 1 hypertension	Stage 2 hypertension
Systolic	less than 120 mmHg	120-139 mmHg	140-159 mmHg	160 mmHg and above
Diastolic	less than 80 mmHg	80-89 mmHg	90-99 mmHg	100 mmHg and above

How will I know if I have high blood pressure?

Your health care provider can tell you if you have high blood pressure by checking your blood pressure with a special meter. You usually cannot feel high blood pressure. Many people who have high blood pressure don't know they have it. You should have your blood pressure checked at least once a year to make sure you don't have high blood pressure. Do not rely on drug store measurements, as they may not be accurate.

What can happen if high blood pressure is not treated?

- Stroke
- Enlarged Heart
- Heart Failure
- Peripheral Vascular Disease
- Heart Attack
- Kidney Disease/Failure

Who is more likely to have high blood pressure?

- People with family members who have high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, or diabetes
- African Americans
- Women who are pregnant
- Women who take birth control pills
- People over 35
- People who are overweight
- People who are not active
- People who drink a lot of alcohol
- People who eat too many fatty foods or foods with too much salt
- People who smoke

What should I do if I have high blood pressure?

- If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, you should discuss your target blood pressure with your doctor. New guidelines recommend lowering blood pressure to less than 140/90 if you are less than 60 years old, or have diabetes or kidney disease, and to less than 150/90 if you are 60 or older. Check your own blood pressure at home as recommended.
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- Eat healthy foods that are low in salt and fat.
- Achieve and maintain your ideal body weight.
- Limit alcohol to no more than two drinks each day. One drink is defined as 1 oz of alcohol, 5 oz of wine, or 12 oz of beer.
- Be more physically active.
- Quit smoking.
- Work on controlling anger and managing stress.
- Take high blood pressure medicine if your health care provider prescribes it, and follow the health care provider's directions carefully.
- Have regular blood pressure checks by your health care provider.

What should I include in my diet to control high blood pressure?

- Eat foods that are lower in fat, salt, and calories such as skim or 1% milk, fresh vegetables and fruit, and plain rice and pasta. (Ask your doctor or health care provider for a more detailed list of salt-free foods to eat.)
- Use flavorings, spices, and herbs to make foods tasty without using salt.
- Avoid or cut down on butter and margarine, regular salad dressings, fatty meats, whole milk dairy products, fried foods, and salted snacks.
- Ask your health care provider if you should increase potassium in your diet or if you need to take a potassium supplement.
- Discuss the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet with your health care provider.

How can I be more active?

- Check first with your health care provider before increasing your physical activity. Ask your provider what type and amount of exercise is right for you.
- Choose aerobic activities such as walking, biking, or swimming.
- Start slowly and increase activity gradually. Aim for a regular routine of activity three to five times a week for 30 to 45 minutes each session.

What should I know about blood pressure medicine?

There are many different medicines to treat high blood pressure, and you might need to take medicine from now on. If you are told by your health care provider to take high blood pressure medicine, be sure to follow the exact directions.

Also ask what side effects can happen with your medicine, and talk to your health care provider about any problems or side effects you might have with your medicine. Lastly, do not stop taking the medicine on your own.