

What is hypertension?



Hypertension, also known as high blood pressure, happens when the pressure inside the blood vessels (arteries and veins) becomes unusually high. High blood pressure damages the blood vessels and can lead to heart attack, stroke, kidney failure and heart failure.

Are you at risk?

Hypertension is called a “silent killer” because people with high blood pressure often do not have any symptoms. Some high-risk factors for high blood pressure include:

- Family history of heart failure or stroke
- Lack of exercise
- Being overweight
- Excessive use of alcohol
- High-salt, high-fat or high-calorie diets

Ask your doctor if you are at high risk for hypertension.

How do you monitor blood pressure?

Because there often are no symptoms, it's important that people monitor their blood pressure. This only happens by measuring blood pressure using a blood pressure cuff and stethoscope or an automated blood pressure device.

What do the numbers mean?

Blood pressure is recorded as a fraction. The upper number represents systolic blood pressure (the highest pressure on your vessels) and the lower number represents diastolic blood pressure (the lowest pressure on your vessels). Both numbers are important.

The ideal blood pressure for an adult is considered to be around 120 over 80. If either number stays over the ideal range of numbers, steps should be taken to bring the numbers back in line. Your doctor can only begin treatment of high blood pressure when high numbers are recorded over a period of time.

Systolic
Highest pressure
on vessels.
120 is ideal.

Diastolic
Lowest pressure
on vessels.
80 is ideal.



How is high blood pressure treated?

Your doctor begins treatment by trying to identify a specific and reversible cause of the high blood pressure. He or she will also check for any damage to the blood vessels caused by high blood pressure.

Non-drug Treatment

Non-drug treatment usually includes:

- Losing weight, if overweight
- Limiting alcohol
- Increasing physical activity
- Eating a balanced diet (fruits, vegetables, grains, low-fat or non-fat dairy products)
- Avoiding salty foods and use of table salt
- Reducing intake of saturated fat and cholesterol
- Stopping smoking

Drug Treatment

Drug therapy is used if the blood pressure is not controlled with non-drug treatment or if the blood pressure is very high. There are many medicines available to treat high blood pressure. Your doctor may consider the following when choosing a medication that's right for you:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Other diseases/conditions you have
- Required doses per day
- Cost

What happens if high blood pressure is not treated?

If high blood pressure is not treated, long-term problems can include heart attacks, kidney failure and atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). In some cases, high blood pressure can cause blindness. Compared to people with controlled high blood pressure, people with uncontrolled high blood pressure are:

- Three times more likely to develop coronary heart disease
- Six times more likely to develop congestive heart failure
- Seven times more likely to have a stroke

Can high blood pressure be controlled?

Yes. Most people can control high blood pressure. More than 90 percent of patients with high blood pressure get good results when they follow their doctors' instructions. And, treatment is more successful if you take an active role in your health.



*Follow your doctor's
instructions.*

