

What Is High Blood Pressure?

Another name for high blood pressure (HBP) is hypertension (hi-per-TEN-shun).

High blood pressure means the pressure in your arteries is consistently above the normal range. Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls. It's written as two numbers, such as 122/78 mm Hg. The top, systolic number is the pressure when the heart beats. The bottom, diastolic number is the pressure when the heart rests between beats. High blood pressure is a pressure of 140 systolic or higher and/or 90 diastolic or higher that stays high over time.

No one knows exactly what causes most cases of high blood pressure. It usually can't be cured, but it can be controlled.

Fifty million Americans (1 in 4 adults) have it, and many don't even know they have it. Not treating high blood pressure is dangerous. You can live a healthier life if you treat and control it!



High blood pressure usually doesn't have any signs — that's why it's so dangerous. Make sure you get it checked regularly and treat it the way your doctor advises.

Who is at higher risk?

- People with close blood relatives who have HBP
- African Americans
- People over age 35
- Overweight people
- People who aren't physically active
- People who use too much salt
- People who use too much alcohol
- People with diabetes, gout and kidney disease
- Pregnant women
- Women who take birth control pills who are overweight, had HBP during pregnancy, have a family history of HBP or have mild kidney disease

How can I tell I have it?

You usually can't tell! Many people have it and don't know it. The only way to know if

your blood pressure is high is to get it checked regularly by your doctor.

What can untreated high blood pressure lead to?

- Stroke
 - Heart attack
 - Heart failure
 - Kidney failure
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What can I do about it?

- Lose weight if you're overweight.
 - Eat a healthy diet low in saturated fat, cholesterol and salt.
 - Limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day for women or two drinks a day for men.
 - Be more physically active.
 - Take medicine the way your doctor tells you.
 - Know what your blood pressure should be and work to keep it at that level.
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How can medicine help?

- Some medicines help relax and open up your blood vessels so blood can flow through better.
 - A diuretic (di-uh-RET-ik) can help keep your body from holding too much water and salt.
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How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or health care professional. Or call your local American Heart Association at 1-800-242-8721, or the American Stroke Association at 1-888-478-7653.
 - If you have high blood pressure, members of your family also may be at higher risk for it. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
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Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

- Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your doctor. For example:

Will I always have to take medicine?

What should my blood pressure be?



Fighting Heart Disease and Stroke

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