

Do You Have High Blood Pressure?

High Blood Pressure

You may have high blood pressure (hypertension) and not even know it. Often there are no signs or symptoms of this dangerous condition.

High blood pressure puts stress on your blood vessel walls and can lead to:

- heart attack
- heart failure
- stroke
- kidney failure.

When your blood pressure is checked, the result is called a reading and is shown as two numbers.

- The top number (systolic) shows the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats.
- The bottom number (diastolic) shows the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests. A typical blood pressure reading is 120/80.

See the chart below for general guidelines. Ask your health care provider about what is right for you.

If you have no signs or symptoms of high blood pressure, you should have your blood pressure checked at every office visit.

If you do have high blood pressure, your health care provider may recommend that it be checked more often.

General Guidelines for Adults

	Top number (systolic)		Bottom number (diastolic)	Follow-up instructions
Normal	less than 120	and	less than 80	Recheck your blood pressure once a year.
Elevated	120 to 129	and	less than 80	Talk with your health care provider about lifestyle changes.
High blood pressure (stage 1)	130 to 139	or	80 to 89	See your health care provider soon to talk about treatment.
High blood pressure (stage 2)	140 or higher	or	90 or higher	Call your health care provider today.

Some of this information is adapted from the American Heart Association and the Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation and Treatment of High Blood Pressure (JNC VII).

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Confirming High Blood Pressure

Your health care provider will tell if you have high blood pressure if:

- you have a blood pressure reading of 130 to 139 or higher or 80-89 or higher *followed by*:
- blood pressure readings of 130 to 139 or higher or 80-89 or higher during 2 follow-up blood pressure visits with at least 2 blood pressure readings each visit.

Who is at Risk

You are at high risk if you:

- have close relatives who have high blood pressure
- are older than age 35
- are overweight
- do not exercise
- are African-American
- eat too much salt
- drink too much alcohol
- take birth control pills
- are pregnant.

Treating High Blood Pressure

You **can** control high blood pressure. If you do not, you could have a heart attack or stroke.

Your health care provider may suggest ways to control your blood pressure.

- Lose weight if you need to. Extra weight causes your heart to work harder.
- Eat a healthful diet that includes no more than 2,000 milligrams of sodium (salt) each day. Salt makes your body hold extra fluid. This can put a strain on your heart.
- Drink no more than 2 alcoholic drinks each day.
- Be more active. A walk or bicycle ride every day can help lower your weight and blood pressure.
- Take any prescribed blood pressure medicine as directed.

- Know what your blood pressure should be and how to keep it there.

Blood Pressure Medicines

There are different types of blood pressure medicines. Your health care provider will decide which is right for you.

- Beta blockers, ACE inhibitors or calcium channel blockers. They open narrow blood vessels to improve blood flow and lower pressure inside the arteries.
- Diuretics. They prevent extra fluid from building up and putting a strain on the heart.

Medicine tips

- Take your medicine as prescribed, even if you feel well. Do not stop taking medicine without talking with your health care provider.
- Take your medicine at the same time each day. Use a weekly pill box or other reminder to help you.

Possible Side Effects

You may have one or more of the following side effects:

- weakness or fatigue (tiredness)
- leg cramps
- cold hands and feet
- feelings of depression
- sleep problems
- slow or fast heartbeat
- skin rash
- loss of sense of taste
- dry cough
- headaches or dizziness
- constipation.

If you have any of these side effects, do not stop taking your medicine before talking with your health care provider.