

# High Blood Pressure (Hypertension): What You Need To Know

## High Blood Pressure

You may have high blood pressure and not even know it. High blood pressure puts stress on your blood vessel walls. There are usually no signs or symptoms.

This silent condition (known as hypertension) can lead to:

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

You should have your blood pressure checked often. Your blood pressure is checked with 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.

You have normal blood pressure if you usually have a top number lower than 120 and a bottom number lower than 80.

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

## Who is at Risk

You are at high risk for high blood pressure if you:

- have close relatives who have high blood pressure
- are older than age 35
- are overweight

## 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	<b>Call your health care provider today.</b>

\* If you have heart disease, your blood pressure goal is less than 130/80. If you have diabetes, your blood pressure goal is less than 139/89.

(over)

- are African-American
- eat too much salt
- drink too much alcohol
- are a woman who takes birth control pills, is pregnant, or has gone through menopause
- do not exercise
- have diabetes.

## What You Can Do

You need to have your high blood pressure treated. If not, you could have a heart attack or stroke. You can control your high blood pressure with lifestyle changes and/or with medicine.

- Lose weight if needed.
- Eat a healthful diet low in fat and salt. Salt makes your body hold extra fluid. This puts a strain on your heart.
- Drink no more than two alcoholic drinks each day.
- Be more active. A walk or bicycle ride every day can help lower your weight and blood pressure.
- Talk with your health care provider about taking a medicine to help lower your blood pressure.
- Know what your blood pressure should be and how to keep it there.

## Blood Pressure Medicines

Your health care provider may decide that you need to take medicine to control high blood pressure.

- Beta blockers, ACE inhibitors or calcium channel blockers open your narrow blood vessels. They improve your blood flow and lower the pressure inside your arteries.
- Diuretics prevent your body from holding too much salt or water.

Your health care provider will find the right medicine(s) for you.

Important reminders about taking high blood pressure medicine:

- Take your medicine(s) as prescribed at the same time each day.
- Take your medicine(s) even if you feel well.
- Do not stop taking your medicine(s) unless your health care provider tells you to.
- Use a weekly pill box or have family members or friends help you remember to take your medicine(s).

High blood pressure medicine has side effects. They may include leg cramps, change in heartbeat, skin rash, and headaches, among others.

Talk with your health care provider about possible side effects before you start taking or change your high blood pressure medicine(s).

## Your Blood Pressure Today

Your blood pressure:

- was checked on \_\_\_\_\_ (date)
- number was \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_
- was taken on your:
  - right arm
  - left arm
- follow-up instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

**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).**