AN OVERVIEW

# Hypertension



*Your doctor has determined that you have high blood pressure, or hypertension. Although high blood pressure is never really cured, it can be controlled by early detection, lifestyle changes and medication.*

*You play a big role in managing your blood pressure and preventing the long-term, negative effects of hypertension. We want to share with you some basic information about hypertension and how you can be an active participant in managing your health.*

About 1 in 4 Americans have hypertension or high blood pressure (BP). It is the leading cause of stroke and a major cause of heart attack. So just what is high blood pressure?

Blood is pumped throughout your body with each beat of your heart. The blood moves through arteries, carrying the oxygen needed for your body to function properly. The force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries is blood pressure.

High blood pressure is called **hypertension**. According to the American Heart Association:

a **systolic** (top number) reading
of **140mmHg** or above
OR
a **diastolic** (bottom number) reading
of **90mmHg** or above
IS CONSIDERED **high blood pressure**

This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional.



It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional for your specific condition.

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# About high blood pressure



Although the exact cause of high blood pressure is unknown, there are several factors and conditions that may increase risk.

- Being overweight or obese
- Smoking
- Little or no exercise
- Too much salt in the diet
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Stress
- Ethnic background
- History of high blood pressure in the family

Untreated hypertension can lead to serious diseases, including stroke, heart disease, heart attack, kidney failure and eye problems. Over time, high blood pressure can lead to:

- Hardening of the arteries, or atherosclerosis
- Blockage of small blood vessels
- Weakening of the blood vessels, causing them to burst

## High blood pressure has been called the "silent killer"

That's because many times people don't even know their blood pressure is high. Often there are no symptoms at all, and even when there are symptoms such as a headache it is not automatically attributed to high blood pressure.

Knowing your blood pressure is important in managing your health. If you are being treated for hypertension, talk to your doctor about your blood pressure. Don't be afraid to ask questions about your blood pressure readings, any blood pressure medications you are on, and what you can do to help control your blood pressure. Monitoring your own blood pressure may tell you whether you are on the right track; in fact, your doctor may ask you to take your own blood pressure regularly and report your readings.



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# About the numbers



## Blood pressure is recorded as TWO numbers.

Example: A blood pressure reading might be recorded as **120/80mmHg**.
The nurse or doctor would tell you that your blood pressure is "120 over 80."
So what does this mean?




Top number:
**systolic**
blood pressure
The pressure against the walls of the arteries **WHEN** your heart beats.

Bottom number:
**diastolic**
blood pressure
The pressure against the walls of the arteries **BETWEEN** heart beats.

## Remember:

Both numbers don't have to be high. If either of them is above the limits, you have high blood pressure. Normal resting blood pressure is considered to be less than 120/80 mm Hg. Your blood pressure may be lower than that, but it's important to let your doctor know if your blood pressure gets too low. If your blood pressure gets too low it is called **hypotension** and could be cause for concern.


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# Criteria for evaluating blood pressure



The American Heart Association has identified the following criteria for evaluating blood pressure. Your doctor may give you specific instructions on what your blood pressure readings should be and what to do if they fall above or below that level. If your doctor hasn't said what range your blood pressure should be in, be sure to ASK.

| Blood pressure category | Systolic<br>mm Hg (top number) | | Diastolic<br>mm Hg (bottom number) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Normal** | less than 120 | and | less than 80 |
| **Prehypertension** | 120 – 139 | or | 80 – 89 |
| **High blood pressure (hypertension) stage 1** | 140 – 159 | or | 90 – 99 |
| **High blood pressure (hypertension) stage 2** | 160 or higher | or | 100 or higher |
| **Hypertensive crisis (emergency care needed)** | Higher than 180 | or | Higher than 110 |



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# How is high blood pressure treated?



There is no cure for high blood pressure. But it can be managed. Your doctor may prescribe specific, important lifestyle changes. Be sure to follow those instructions carefully.

You doctor may also prescribe medications to help manage your high blood pressure. We will be talking with you at a later date about:

- what medications you are on
- what they are used for
- instructions for taking them
- possible side effects

If you are diagnosed with high blood pressure, it won't ever go away. If you are following your treatment plan, your blood pressure readings could be normal. But, you still have high blood pressure. If you stop following your treatment plan, your blood pressure will likely increase.

## Lifestyle changes to consider



- Follow a healthy diet and nutrition plan.
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Cut down on salt in your diet
- Include appropriate physical activity in your daily schedule
- Limit your alcohol intake
- Quit smoking
- Learn healthy ways to cope with stress



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