

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is a measure of the force which is exerted by the blood on the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps it through the body.

Blood pressure readings are usually given as two numbers -- for example, 120 over 80 (written as 120/80 mmHg). One or both of these numbers can be too high.

The first number is the *systolic pressure*, the pressure inside the arteries when the heart is contracting.
 The second number is the *diastolic pressure*, the pressure level during the time the heart muscle is relaxing.

Normal Readings

Health care providers consider the average range for blood pressure to be from 90-140 systolic, and from 60-90 diastolic. An average optimum level is 120/80 or less. Blood pressure is generally viewed as high if it is consistently above 140 systolic and 90 diastolic. If you have several readings above 140/90 you should see your doctor.

NOTE: A single elevated blood pressure reading DOES NOT mean you have hypertension. The readings must be consistently high.

IS YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE TOO HIGH?

Classification	Systolic (mmHg)	Diastolic (mmHg)
Normal	≤ 120	≤ 80
Prehypertension	120 - 139	80-89
Hypertension	≥ 140	≥ 90

What is hypertension?

Hypertension is chronic high blood pressure. This usually occurs when the small blood vessels (arterioles) become narrowed and the heart has to pump harder to force the blood through the body. High blood pressure increases your chance of having a stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease, and early death.

Hypertension can affect anyone, but your chances may be increased if you fall into certain high-risk groups. You have a higher risk of high blood pressure if you:

- Are African American
- Are obese
- Are often stressed or anxious
- Drink too much alcohol (more than one drink per day for women, and more than two drinks per day for men)
- Eat too much salt
- Have a family history of high blood pressure
- Have diabetes
- Smoke

Symptoms

While hypertension is more common in older people, it can affect people of all ages. Those with mild hypertension usually do not experience any symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they would include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Visual changes
- Chest pain
- Confusion
- Tiredness

These symptoms, however, occur for many other reasons. For example, exercise, worry and/or stress can temporarily raise blood pressure, in those people with hypertension as well as those with normal blood pressure. A diagnosis of hypertension must be made by a doctor.

Treatment

Prolonged high blood pressure (if left untreated) can be a major cause of strokes, heart disease, and kidney failure. For individuals diagnosed with hypertension, anti-hypertensive drugs can be prescribed by a doctor. Hypertension can also be controlled by:

- Changing diet and decreasing salt intake
- Weight reduction
- Regular exercise, especially aerobic activity

Smoking

Smoking is one of the major risk factors that is associated with heart disease. So if you smoke, stop. And if you are more than 20 pounds over your ideal weight (for your height), consider consulting a healthcare professional about the methods available to you for weight loss and exercise.

Prevention

Controlling high blood pressure will reduce the risk of complications associated with hypertension. Getting your blood pressure checked regularly is the only means of checking for hypertension.

The best way to prevent hypertension is to help your body today. This means implementing a few lifestyle changes. Some tips to help you fight hypertension include:

- Consult a healthcare provider.
- Have your blood pressure monitored regularly by a healthcare provider.
- Have your cholesterol levels checked.
- Exercise regularly - at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day.
- Maintain a daily low-salt diet.
- Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake.
- Maintain your ideal weight.
- If you smoke, quit - find a program that will help you stop.
- Participate in relaxing activities that you enjoy.
- Learn better ways of coping with stress.

For More Information:

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