

High Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against blood vessels. When blood cannot flow easily through the blood vessels, blood pressure goes up.

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers, such as 120/80. The top number (systolic pressure) measures the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart is beating. The bottom number (diastolic pressure) measures the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart is resting between beats.

Higher numbers mean higher pressure. Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80. There is an increased chance of developing high blood pressure when the numbers increase over 120/80. High blood pressure is when it stays above 140/90 over a period of time.

It is important to have your blood pressure checked to know whether it is high or not. High blood pressure may not cause any symptoms. Many people have high blood pressure without knowing it.

High blood pressure can cause serious health problems if it is left untreated. High blood pressure is the leading cause of stroke. High blood pressure also increases risk of heart disease.

Have your blood pressure checked by a health professional at least every two years. Have it checked more often if your blood pressure is high. Have it checked more often if a family member has had high blood pressure.

High blood pressure can be prevented or controlled by having a healthy lifestyle.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** High blood pressure is twice as common among people who are overweight. A healthy weight means lower blood pressure for most people.
- **Be physically active.** Regular physical activity makes the heart stronger. It lowers the pressure needed to pump blood through the blood vessels. Try going for a brisk, 30-minute walk on most days of the week.
- **Cut back on sodium.** Eating foods low in sodium often helps to lower blood pressure and keep it down. Using less salt is an easy way to cut back on sodium. Read the nutrition labels on packaged foods to find products low in sodium.

- **Limit alcohol intake.** If you drink alcohol, drink no more than one or two drinks per day.
- **Be smoke free.** Smoking triples your chance of having a heart attack if you also have high blood pressure. Get help to quit smoking.



Making these lifestyle changes may be enough to lower your blood pressure. If not, your doctor may prescribe medicine along with the lifestyle changes to lower your blood pressure. Be sure to take your medicine every day as prescribed by your doctor, even if you feel good.