

WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of arteries. Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers — the Systolic Pressure and the Diastolic Pressure.

SYSTOLIC PRESSURE is the force of blood against the walls of the arteries as the heart beats, and is shown as the top number in a blood pressure reading.

High systolic pressure can lead to:

- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Congestive heart failure
- Kidney disease

DIASTOLIC PRESSURE is the force of blood against the walls of the arteries as the heart relaxes between beats and is shown as the bottom number in a blood pressure reading.

High diastolic pressure can lead to:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Kidney failure

Normal blood pressure is less than 120 mmHg (millimeters of mercury) systolic and less than 80 mmHg diastolic, expressed verbally as "120 over 80".



TIPS FOR HAVING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE TAKEN

- Don't drink coffee or smoke cigarettes 30 minutes before having your blood pressure measured.
- Before the test, sit for five minutes with your back supported and your feet flat on the ground. Rest your arm on a table at the level of your heart.
- Wear short sleeves so your arm is exposed.
- Go to the bathroom prior to the reading. A full bladder can change your blood pressure reading.
- Ask the doctor or nurse to tell you the blood pressure reading in numbers.





SYMPTOMS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Known as the "silent killer", high blood pressure often has no signs or symptoms.

That is why it is important to have your blood pressure checked at least one a year.

If you do have symptoms, they may include:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Nosebleeds
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Very rarely, the first symptom of high blood pressure may be a stroke.

CATEGORIES FOR BLOOD PRESSURE LEVELS IN ADULTS

18 Years and Older

Blood Pressure Level (mmHg)		
Category	Systolic	Diastolic
Normal	< 120 and	< 80
Prehypertension	120-139 or	80-89
High Blood Pressure		
Stage 1 Hypertension	140-159 or	90-99
Stage 2 Hypertension	≥ 160 or	≥ 100

- 30% of Americans, or 1 in 3 adults have high blood pressure.
- 28% of Americans have prehypertension, an early stage of high blood pressure that also damages the arteries, heart and brain.
- Even if your blood pressure is normal now, you still have a 90% chance of developing high pressure sometime in your life.

When your blood pressure is high (also known as hypertension), your heart must work harder in order to pump a normal amount of blood through your body. The added workload of the heart causes thickening of the heart muscle. Over time, the thickening damages the heart muscle so that it can no longer pump normally.

RISK FACTORS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

There are many causes of high blood pressure, including genetic conditions, medical conditions such as kidney disease, thyroid or parathyroid disease and steroids and certain other drugs.

Unchangeable Risks — Common unmodifiable risks related to high blood pressure

- Age — Risk increases as we get older. By age 65, 1 in 2 Americans have high blood pressure.
- Gender — Males have a greater chance of developing high blood pressure than females until age 55. However, after the age of 75, women are more likely to develop high blood pressure than men.
- Race — African Americans are more likely to get high blood pressure than whites and at an earlier age.
- Family history — If you have parents, brothers, or sisters with high blood pressure, you may have inherited a similar tendency.

Modifiable Risks — Most cases of high blood pressure, however, are linked to modifiable risk factors.

- Excess body weight — As weight goes up, so does the risk of hypertension.
- Physical inactivity — Regular physical activity is one positive step you can take to lower blood pressure or help prevent high blood pressure from developing.
- Alcohol — A high intake of alcohol is strongly related to high blood pressure.
- Smoking — Nicotine present in smoke increases blood pressure and heart rate.
- Medications — Certain drugs can raise blood pressure including steroids, anti-inflammatory, anti-depressants.
- Poor diet — A diet high in salt, high in saturated fat and low in fruits and vegetables is linked to increased risk of high blood pressure.

Your physician will use both the systolic and diastolic blood pressure to determine your blood pressure category and appropriate prevention and treatment activities.

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