

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)



What is hypertension?

Blood pressure is the force exerted by circulating blood against the walls of the body's arteries, the major blood vessels in the body. Hypertension is when blood pressure is too high.

Blood pressure is written as two numbers. The first (systolic) number represents the pressure in blood vessels when the heart contracts or beats. The second (diastolic) number represents the pressure in the vessels when the heart rests between beats.

Hypertension is diagnosed if, when it is measured on two different days, the systolic blood pressure readings on both days is ≥ 140 mmHg and/or the diastolic blood pressure readings on both days is ≥ 90 mmHg.

What are common symptoms of hypertension?

Hypertension is called a "silent killer". Most people with hypertension are unaware of the problem because it may have no warning signs or symptoms. For this reason, it is essential that blood pressure is measured regularly.

When symptoms do occur, they can include early morning headaches, nosebleeds, irregular heart rhythms, vision changes, and buzzing in the ears.

Severe hypertension can cause fatigue, nausea, vomiting, confusion, anxiety, chest pain, and muscle tremors.

The only way to detect hypertension is to have a health professional measure blood pressure. Having blood pressure measured is quick and painless. Although individuals can measure their own blood pressure using automated devices, an evaluation by a health professional is important for assessment of risk and associated conditions.

What are the complications of uncontrolled hypertension?

Among other complications, hypertension can cause serious damage to the heart. Excessive pressure can harden arteries, decreasing the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart. This elevated pressure and reduced blood flow can cause:

- Chest pain, also called angina.
- Heart attack, which occurs when the blood supply to the heart is blocked and heart muscle cells die from lack of oxygen. The longer the blood flow is blocked, the greater the damage to the heart.
- Heart failure, which occurs when the heart cannot pump enough blood and oxygen to other vital body organs.
- Irregular heart beat which can lead to a sudden death.

Hypertension can also burst or block arteries that supply blood and oxygen to the brain, causing a stroke.

In addition, hypertension can cause kidney damage, leading to kidney failure.

How can the burden of hypertension be reduced?

Reducing hypertension prevents heart attack, stroke, and kidney damage, as well as other health problems.

Prevention

- Reducing salt intake (to less than 5g daily).
- Eating more fruit and vegetables.
- Being physically active on a regular basis.
- Avoiding use of tobacco.
- Reducing alcohol consumption.
- Limiting the intake of foods high in saturated fats.
- Eliminating/reducing trans fats in diet.

Management

Reducing and managing stress.

- Regularly checking blood pressure.
- Treating high blood pressure.
- Managing other medical conditions.

KNOW YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE —AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

By AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION NEWS



The newest guidelines for hypertension:

NORMAL BLOOD PRESSURE

*Recommendations: Healthy lifestyle choices and yearly checks.

ELEVATED BLOOD PRESSURE

*Recommendations: Healthy lifestyle changes, reassessed in 3-6 months.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE / STAGE 1

*Recommendations: 10-year heart disease and stroke risk assessment. If less than 10% risk, lifestyle changes, reassessed in 3-6 months. If higher, lifestyle changes and medication with monthly follow-ups until BP controlled.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE / STAGE 2

*Recommendations: Lifestyle changes and 2 different classes of medicine, with monthly follow-ups until BP is controlled.

**Individual recommendations need to come from your doctor.*

Source: American Heart Association's journal Hypertension

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