

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Living Well



What is High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the blood vessels as it flows through the body. Blood pressure will change throughout the day, depending if you are active or inactive, eating, or sleeping. When blood pressure is elevated for long periods of time, it can damage the blood vessels, heart, kidneys and other organs, and can cause stroke. Since blood travels everywhere throughout the body, every organ can be affected.

Symptoms

High blood pressure, also known as **hypertension**, is called the “silent killer” because it usually doesn’t cause symptoms. Symptoms may occur if blood pressure is extremely high (greater than 180/120); this is called a hypertensive crisis. Hypertensive crisis is a medical emergency that needs to be treated quickly.

CAUSES OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Most people have **primary hypertension**. Primary hypertension may not have an exact cause. Risk factors for developing high blood pressure include:

- aging
- alcohol consumption (more than 2 drinks/day for men and more than 1 drink/day for women).
- smoking or secondhand smoke exposure
- overweight or obesity
- ongoing stress
- diet high in salt (sodium)
- diet low in calcium, potassium, and magnesium
- sedentary (low exercise/inactive) lifestyle
- insulin resistance or diabetes
- African American and Hispanic descent
- family history

Secondary hypertension is high blood pressure that is caused by another health condition or medicine such as:

- kidney disease
- sleep apnea (obstructive)
- certain medicines such as birth control pills, steroids, antidepressants, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines like Motrin® or Aleve®
- hormone related conditions such as hyperthyroid, hypothyroid or Cushing’s disease

Medicines

Medicine can help manage high blood pressure. There are many different types of medicine choices for controlling blood pressure. It may be necessary to try several different medicines or a combination of medicines in order to reach your target blood pressure goal. The medicines work best when taken regularly. Don't stop taking your blood pressure medicine without talking to your healthcare provider first. Stopping medicine suddenly can cause your blood pressure to rise again (often without symptoms) and possibly cause more damage to your heart, blood vessels or kidneys. Work with your healthcare provider if you are having side effects or difficulties taking your medicines.

KNOW YOUR MEDICINES:

- 1. Keep a list of all your medicines with you in your wallet and bring to all your healthcare appointments.**
- 2. Medicine choices that you might take each day for high blood pressure include:**
 - **Diuretics**—"water pills" that help the body get rid of excess fluid during urination.
 - **ACE inhibitors/ARBs**—relax the blood vessels so the heart doesn't have to pump so hard.
 - **Beta blockers**—slows the heart rate and improves the pumping action of the heart muscle.
 - **Calcium channel blockers**—reduce the muscle contractions of the heart leading to relaxed and widened blood vessels.
 - **Direct renin inhibitors**—relax and widen blood vessels so the heart doesn't have to pump so hard.
 - **Miscellaneous medicine**—alpha blockers and vasodilators—relax and widen (dilate) blood vessels.

Talk with your healthcare provider about your medicines.

Be sure you know:

- the names of all your medicines.
- what they are used for.
- how to take them and how often.
- side effects that may happen.
- when to call your healthcare provider.

Vaccinations

FLU SHOT

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends flu vaccination for all persons over 6 months of age.

PNEUMOCOCCAL VACCINE

The pneumococcal vaccine may not prevent you from getting pneumonia, but it can lower your risk of serious pneumonia related complications. There are 2 types of pneumococcal vaccines that are recommended for:

- anyone ages 2-64 who have certain health conditions*.
- all smokers age 19-64*.
- all adults 65 and older should have both of these vaccines.

**A second dose may be recommended 5 years after the initial shot for high risk people who are still under age 65. Check with your healthcare provider for when you should have this vaccine or if it is time for a booster.*

These vaccines are usually offered with no cost to you at your doctors office, local pharmacy, or convenient care provider.

Healthy Choices

QUIT SMOKING

Smoking increases your blood pressure and can cause damage to the blood vessels. It also increases your risk of developing heart disease and strokes. Quitting smoking is not easy, but it can be done. If you've tried to quit before and it didn't work, don't give up. Many people try to stop 2 or more times before they succeed. You can do it!

Work closely with your Health Coach and your healthcare provider to gain solid quitting tips. Find out ways to avoid weight gain. Learn about new medicines that help lower the urge to smoke.

HEALTHY EATING

A diet high in sodium and low in calcium, magnesium, and potassium contributes to high blood pressure. By cutting back on your salt and eating less processed foods you can help lower your blood pressure. For people at higher risk of developing high blood

pressure, such as African Americans, senior citizens and people with diabetes, this is especially important. The DASH diet (**D**ietary **A**pproaches to **S**top **H**ypertension) includes foods that are naturally high in calcium, potassium and magnesium such as fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and dried beans. The Mediterranean Diet also may help lower heart disease risk by increasing these healthy foods in your diet. Vitamin pills or supplements will not help lower your blood pressure as easily as the foods in your diet will.

Read food labels and choose foods that are low in salt, fats, and calories.

Talk to a Health Coach, Registered Dietitian or your healthcare provider to learn more about how your diet affects blood pressure or to learn more about:

- Low Salt Diet
- DASH Diet
- Mediterranean Diet

LOSE EXTRA WEIGHT

Being overweight puts more stress on your heart and blood vessels. Losing even 5 to 10 pounds can lower your blood pressure and reduce your cholesterol levels. Try to reduce your calories and increase your activity and exercise. Dietitians and Health Coaches are available to help you to reach your weight loss goals.

REDUCE STRESS

Stress can affect your health in many ways. It increases your heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol, breathing rate and blood sugar. It can also cause muscle aches and pains and stomach problems. Long-term stress will harden and narrow your blood vessels and raise your blood pressure.

Find healthy ways to unwind and relax. Taking slow deep breaths when you are stressed or worried can help. You can also reduce stress by relaxing your mind and body, getting enough sleep, eating healthy (by limiting caffeine, alcohol and avoiding overeating) and getting regular exercise.

Staying Active

EXERCISE

Try to get 30 to 40 minutes of physical activity most days of the week. You don't have to go to the gym to get exercise and you don't have to do it all at once — three 10 minute sessions are just as good. Gardening, riding a bike, dancing and walking at a brisk pace all count toward your 30–40 minutes. Choosing activities that you enjoy and finding a friend to join you, will help keep you motivated.

Aerobic exercise, where your heartbeat and breathing increases, is the most helpful for lowering blood pressure. If it has been a long time since you have exercised check with your healthcare provider for activities that are safe for you.

SUPPORT

Don't feel that you are alone in your health. Getting support from your family, friends, co-workers, and health care providers can be an important part of taking charge of your health. Look for community and national support groups or talk to a Health Coach to learn more ways to manage your high blood pressure.

For questions, health information, and support, talk to your Health Coach. A Health Coach is available by phone—**AT NO COST TO YOU 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK.**

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of information or medical care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your physician or other medical professional.