

What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls. When pressure is high, the heart must work harder to pump blood through the blood vessels. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is often called the "silent killer" because there are little or no symptoms associated with it. Over time, unmanaged hypertension can lead to heart disease and failure, and damage to the brain, eyes, and kidneys.

How Is Blood Pressure Measured?

Your blood pressure appears as two numbers. The first and higher of the two is the systolic pressure. It is the pressure of blood against the arterial walls, which peaks with each beat of the heart. The second number measures diastolic pressure, or the pressure in the arteries when the heart rests between beats.

120 mmHg - Systolic
80 mmHg - Diastolic

Testing

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it tested with a blood pressure cuff. It is painless and takes only a few minutes.

Blood Pressure Category	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120-129	and	Less than 80
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1	130-139	or	80-89
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2	140 or Higher	or	90 or Higher
Hypertensive Crisis (consult your doctor immediately)	Higher than 180	and / or	Higher than 120

What Causes High Blood Pressure?

Several factors and conditions may play a role in its development including:

- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Lack of physical activity
- Excess salt in your diet
- Excess alcohol consumption (more than 1 to 2 drinks a day)
- Stress
- Older age
- Genetics
- Family history of high blood pressure
- Chronic kidney disease
- Adrenal and thyroid disease

American Heart Association states nearly half of Americans have high blood pressure.



High blood pressure is the leading cause of stroke and a major cause of heart attack.

High Blood Pressure May Cause These Diseases

Atherosclerosis	A disease of the arteries caused by a buildup of plaque, or fatty material, on the inside walls of the blood vessels. High blood pressure contributes to this buildup by putting added stress and force on the artery walls.
Heart Disease	Heart failure (the heart can't adequately pump blood), ischemic heart disease (the heart tissue doesn't get enough blood), and hypertensive hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (enlarged heart) are all associated with high blood pressure.
Kidney Disease	Hypertension can damage the blood vessels and filters in the kidneys, so that the kidneys cannot excrete waste properly.
Stroke	Hypertension can lead to stroke, either by contributing to the process of atherosclerosis (which can lead to blockages and/or clots), or by weakening a blood vessel wall and causing it to rupture.
Eye Disease	Hypertension can damage the very small blood vessels in the retina.

How Can I Prevent High Blood Pressure?

Maintain a Healthy Weight. Being overweight can make you two to six times more likely to develop high blood pressure than if you are at your desirable weight. Even small amounts of weight loss can make a big difference in helping to prevent and treat high blood pressure.

Exercise Regularly. People who are physically active have a 20-50% lower risk of getting high blood pressure than people who are not active. Even light activities, if done daily, can help lower your risk.

Consume a Healthy Diet. A nutrient-dense diet rich in potassium, calcium and magnesium, and low in sodium, has been found to help control blood pressure. Include plenty of fruits and vegetables in your diet. Look for products that contain "no salt added" or "low sodium." Opt to flavor foods using tart flavors or fresh/dried herbs and spices.

Reduce or Stop Using Alcohol. Stop using alcohol or limit alcohol consumption to no more than two drinks a day, to reduce the risk of high blood pressure.

Reduce Stress. If not managed, stress can contribute to the onset of high blood pressure.



Resources

- www.heart.org
- www.mayoclinic.com
- www.webmd.com