

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HYPERTENSION

In the Clinic
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What Is Hypertension?

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a common and urgent health problem. Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps blood through your body. High blood pressure makes your heart work harder with every beat. Untreated hypertension puts you at higher risk for heart attack, heart failure, stroke, kidney failure, and death.

What Are the Warning Signs?

People with hypertension often have no symptoms. The only way to know for sure if your blood pressure is high is to have it checked.

How Often Should I Have My Blood Pressure Checked?

It is a good idea to have your blood pressure checked at least once a year if you are older than 40 years. If you are 18 to 39 years old, your blood pressure should be checked every 3 to 5 years.

Am I at Risk?

There is no single identifiable cause of hypertension. Many factors can contribute, including:

- Being overweight or obese
- Eating a diet high in sodium (salt)
- Not getting enough physical activity
- Being older or African American
- Smoking
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Having a personal or family history of hypertension
- Having other chronic diseases, especially diabetes or kidney disease
- Taking specific medications that are known to cause hypertension

How Is It Diagnosed?

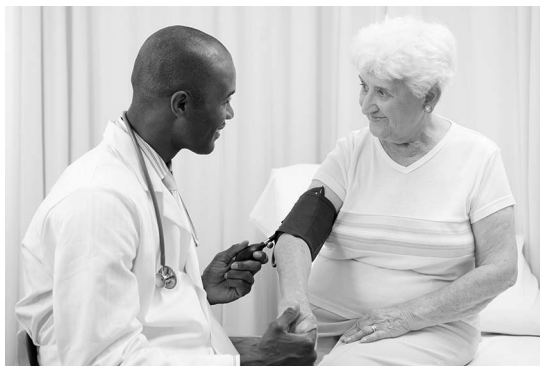
Your health care provider will ask you to sit quietly for several minutes before taking a reading of your blood pressure.

Blood pressure is measured by inflating a cuff around the arm—this is connected to a device that measures the pressure. The test is easy and painless. Your provider should make sure that your arm is supported and the cuff fits you correctly.

Your provider may take several readings at different times before diagnosing you with hypertension. This is because blood pressure usually changes during the day.

Some people's blood pressure readings differ between the doctor's office and at home. If your provider suspects this, you may be given the option to monitor your blood pressure away from the office with a special device.

The blood pressure reading is given as 2 numbers (for example, 120/80). The first number is the



systolic pressure (the pressure when your heart pushes blood into your vessels with each beat), and the second number is the diastolic pressure (the pressure while the heart is relaxed between beats).

If your provider suspects you have hypertension, you will have a physical examination and additional laboratory tests. Your provider also will ask you questions about your lifestyle, medical history, and current medications.

How Is It Treated?

Lifestyle changes are helpful for everyone with high blood pressure. Follow these healthy habits, even if you take blood pressure medicine:

- Exercise vigorously enough to raise your heart rate (30 minutes a day)
- Lose weight
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and dairy products
- Eat less salt
- Drink less alcohol
- Quit smoking

Many medicines can treat high blood pressure.

Your doctor may prescribe 1 medicine or a combination of several. Almost everyone with high blood pressure can bring down their blood pressure with lifestyle changes with or without medicines.

Questions for My Doctor

- How often should I have my blood pressure checked?
- Should I check my blood pressure at home?
- What is my blood pressure goal?
- Do I need to take medicine to treat my high blood pressure?
- What are the possible side effects of blood pressure medicines?
- If I lose weight and exercise, is it possible that my blood pressure will return to normal?
- How much salt should I eat each day?

For More Information



American College of Physicians
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American Heart Association

www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure

MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressure.html>