

Blood Pressure

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 (as the heart beats) over the diastolic pressure (as the heart relaxes between beats). The measurement is written one above or before the other, with the systolic number on top and the diastolic number on the bottom. For example, a blood pressure measurement of 120/80 mmHg (millimeters of mercury) is expressed verbally as "120 over 80." **Normal blood pressure** is less than 120 mmHg systolic and less than 80 mmHg diastolic.



High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure increases your chance (or risk) for getting heart disease and/or kidney disease, and for having a stroke. It is especially dangerous because it often has no warning signs or symptoms. Regardless of race, age, or gender, anyone can develop high blood pressure. It is estimated that one in every four American adults has high blood pressure. Once high blood pressure develops, it usually lasts a lifetime. You can prevent and control high blood pressure by taking action.

Why Is High Blood Pressure Important?

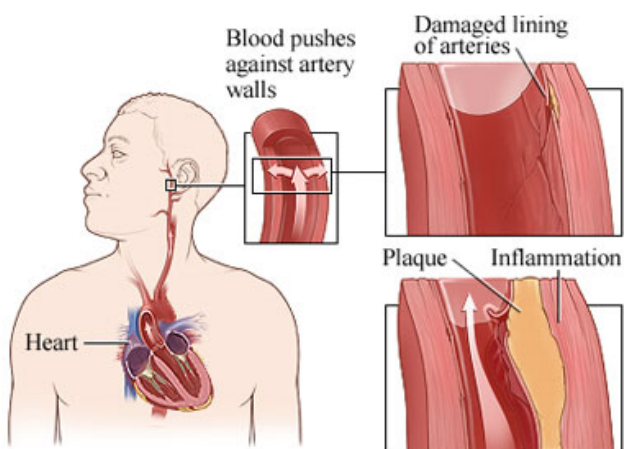
High blood pressure (hypertension) is dangerous because it makes the heart work too hard. It also makes the walls of the arteries hard. High blood pressure increases the **risk for heart disease and stroke**, the first- and third-leading causes of death for Americans.

Effect of High Blood Pressure on Your Body

Stroke: High blood pressure is the most important risk factor for stroke. Very high pressure can cause a break in a weakened blood vessel, which then bleeds in the brain. This can cause a stroke. If a blood clot blocks one of the narrowed arteries, it can also cause a stroke.

Impaired vision: High blood pressure can eventually cause blood vessels in the eye to burst or bleed. Vision may become blurred or otherwise impaired and can result in blindness.

Kidney damage: The kidneys act as filters to rid the body of wastes. Over time, high blood pressure can narrow and thicken the blood vessels of the kidneys. The kidneys filter less fluid, and waste builds up in the blood. The kidneys may fail altogether. When this happens, medical treatment (dialysis) or a kidney transplant may be needed.



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Heart attack: High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart attack. The arteries bring oxygen-carrying blood to the heart muscle. If the heart cannot get enough oxygen, chest pain, also known as "angina," can occur. If the flow of blood is blocked, a heart attack results.

Congestive heart failure: High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for congestive heart failure (CHF). CHF is a serious condition in which the heart is unable to pump enough blood to supply the body's needs.

Blood Pressure, continued

Prevention

You can take steps to prevent high blood pressure by adopting a healthy lifestyle. These steps include maintaining a healthy weight; being physically active; following a healthy eating plan, that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and lowfat dairy foods; choosing and preparing foods with less salt and sodium; and, if you drink alcoholic beverages, drinking in moderation.

Treatment of High Blood Pressure

It is important to take steps to keep your blood pressure under control. Adopting healthy lifestyle habits is an effective first step in both preventing and controlling high blood pressure. If lifestyle changes alone are not effective in keeping your pressure controlled, it may be necessary to add blood pressure medications.

Blood Pressure	Systolic		Diastolic
Low Blood Pressure (hypotension)	50-90		35-60
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
High Normal (pre-hypertension)	120-139	or	80-89
High Blood Pressure (hypertension) stage 1	140-159	or	90-99
High Blood Pressure (hypertension) stage 2	160 or higher	or	100 or higher
High Blood Pressure (hypertension) stage 3/4	Higher than 180	or	Higher than 110