

## High Blood Pressure



Blood pressure is a measure of the force of blood against the walls of your arteries.

Blood pressure readings include two numbers, such as 130/80, or "130 over 80." The first number is the systolic pressure. This is the force of blood on the artery walls as your heart pumps. The second number is the diastolic pressure. This is the force of blood on the artery walls between heartbeats, when your heart rests.

### What is high blood pressure?

If your blood pressure is usually above 140/90, you have high blood pressure, or hypertension.

Despite what a lot of people think, high blood pressure usually does not cause headaches or make you feel dizzy or lightheaded. It usually has no symptoms. However, it does increase your risk for heart attack, stroke, heart failure, and kidney or eye damage. The higher your blood pressure, the more your risk increases.

If you have high blood pressure, your doctor will give you a blood pressure goal. Your goal will be based on your health and your age. An example of a goal is to keep your blood pressure below 140/90.

Lifestyle changes, such as eating healthy and being active, are always important to help lower blood pressure. You might also take medicine to reach your blood pressure goal.

### What can you do about high blood pressure?

#### Follow your treatment plan

- Take your medicines as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. You may take one or more types of medicine to lower your blood pressure. If you stop taking your medicine, your blood pressure will go back up.
- See your doctor regularly.
- Learn how to check your blood pressure at home.
- If you are taking blood pressure medicine, talk to your doctor before you take decongestants or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen. Some of these can raise blood pressure or interact with blood pressure medicines.

#### Make lifestyle changes

- Stay at a healthy weight. This is especially important if you put on weight around your waist. If you are overweight, losing even 10 pounds can help you lower your blood pressure.
- Try to do moderate aerobic activity at least 2½ hours a week. Or try to do vigorous activity at least 1¼ hours a week.

- If you drink alcohol, drink moderately. Limit alcohol to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women.
- Try to limit the amount of sodium you eat to less than 1,500 milligrams (mg) a day.
- Follow the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan. This plan can help you lower blood pressure. Its focus is on fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, and low-fat dairy foods. This type of eating plan can help you lose weight and also lower your risk for heart disease.
- Do not smoke. Smoking increases your risk for heart attack and stroke. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.

## When should you call for help?

Call a doctor **right away** if you have high blood pressure and:

- Your blood pressure is much higher than normal (such as 180/110 or higher).
- You think high blood pressure is causing symptoms such as:
  - Severe headaches.
  - Blurry vision.

Call a doctor if:

- Your blood pressure is 140/90 or higher on two or more occasions.
- You think you may be having side effects from your blood pressure medicine.
- Your blood pressure is usually normal and well controlled, but it goes above the normal range on more than one occasion.

**Make an appointment** to see your doctor if you have never been diagnosed with high blood pressure but you have a high blood pressure reading.