

High blood pressure is a common condition in which the force of the blood against your artery walls is high enough that it may eventually cause health problems, such as heart disease.

Blood pressure is determined by the amount of blood your heart pumps and the amount of resistance to blood flow in your arteries. The more blood your heart pumps and the narrower your arteries, the higher your blood pressure.

You can have high blood pressure (hypertension) for years without any symptoms. Uncontrolled high blood pressure increases your risk of serious health problems, including heart attack and stroke.

High blood pressure typically develops over many years, and it affects nearly everyone eventually. Fortunately, high blood pressure can be easily detected. And once you know you have high blood pressure, you can work with your doctor to control it.

The Center of Disease Control (CDC) reports that nearly half of adults in the United States (47%, or 116 million) have hypertension, defined as a systolic blood pressure greater than 130 mmHg or a diastolic blood pressure greater than 80 mmHg or are taking medication for hypertension. Only about 1 in 4 adults (24%) with hypertension have their condition under control.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates 1.28 billion adults aged 30-79 years worldwide have hypertension, most (two-thirds) living in low- and middle-income countries. An estimated 46% of adults with hypertension are unaware that they have the condition and less than half of adults (42%) with hypertension are diagnosed and treated.

## Symptoms

**Most people with high blood pressure have no signs or symptoms**, even if blood pressure readings reach dangerously high levels.

Although a few people with early-stage high blood pressure may have **dull headaches, dizzy spells or a few more nosebleeds than normal**, these signs and symptoms typically don't occur until high blood pressure has reached a severe — even life-threatening — stage.

## Risk Factors

High blood pressure has many risk factors, including:

- **Age.** The risk of high blood pressure increases as you age.
- **Race.** High blood pressure is particularly common among blacks,
- **Family history.** High blood pressure tends to run in families.
- **Being overweight or obese.** The more you weigh, the more blood you need to supply oxygen and nutrients to your tissues.
- **Not being physically active.** People who are inactive tend to have higher heart rates.
- **Using tobacco.** Not only does smoking or chewing tobacco immediately raise your blood pressure temporarily, but the chemicals in tobacco can damage the lining of your artery walls. Secondhand smoke also can increase your blood pressure.

- **Too much salt (sodium) in your diet.** Too much sodium in your diet can cause your body to retain fluid, which increases blood pressure.
- **Too little potassium in your diet.** Potassium helps balance the amount of sodium in your cells
- **Too little vitamin D in your diet.** It's uncertain if having too little vitamin D in your diet can lead to high blood pressure.
- **Drinking too much alcohol.** Over time, heavy drinking can damage your heart.
- **Stress.** High levels of stress can lead to a temporary, but dramatic, increase in blood pressure
- **Certain chronic conditions.** Certain chronic conditions also may increase your risk of high blood pressure, including high cholesterol, diabetes, kidney disease and sleep apnea.
- **Sometimes pregnancy (preeclampsia/ toxemia)** contributes to high blood pressure, as well.

Blood Pressure Levels	
<b>Normal</b>	Systolic: less than 120 mmHg Diastolic: less than 80 mmHg
<b>At Risk (Prehypertension)</b>	Systolic: 120–139 mmHg Diastolic: 80–89 mmHg
<b>High</b>	Systolic: 140 mmHg or higher Diastolic: 90 mmHg or higher

### Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to:

- Heart attack or stroke
- Aneurysm.
- Heart failure
- Weakened and narrowed blood vessels in your kidneys.
- Thickened, narrowed or torn blood vessels in the eyes which can lead to vision loss.
- Trouble with memory or understanding.
- Metabolic syndrome. This syndrome is a cluster of disorders of your body's metabolism — including increased waist circumference, high triglycerides, low high-density lipoprotein (HDL), or "good," cholesterol, high blood pressure, and high insulin levels. If you have high blood pressure, you're more likely to have other components of metabolic syndrome. The more components you have, the greater your risk of developing diabetes, heart disease or stroke.

### Lifestyle changes can help you control and prevent high blood pressure

- **Eat healthy foods.** Try the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, which emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy foods. Get plenty of potassium, which can help prevent and control high blood pressure. Eat less saturated fat and total fat.
- **Decrease the salt in your diet.** A lower sodium level— 1,500 milligrams (mg) a day — is appropriate for people 51 years of age or older, Otherwise, healthy people can aim for 2,300 mg a day or less.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** If you're overweight, losing even 5 pounds (2.3 kilograms) can lower your blood pressure.
- **Increase physical activity.** Strive for at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day.

- **Limit alcohol.**
- **Don't smoke.**
- **Manage stress.** Reduce stress as much as possible. Practice healthy coping techniques, such as muscle relaxation and deep breathing. Getting plenty of sleep can help, too.
- **Monitor your blood pressure at home.** Home blood pressure monitoring can help you keep closer tabs on your blood pressure, show if medication is working, and even alert you and your doctor to potential complications
- **Practice relaxation or slow, deep breathing.** Practice taking deep, slow breaths to help relax.

## Treatment

Changing your lifestyle can go a long way toward controlling high blood pressure. But sometimes lifestyle changes aren't enough. In addition to diet and exercise, your doctor may recommend medication to lower your blood pressure. This may require a combination of 2-3 medications. Which category of medication your doctor prescribes depends on your stage of high blood pressure and whether you also have other medical problems.

If you don't take your high blood pressure medications exactly as directed, your blood pressure can pay the price. If you skip doses because you can't afford the medication, because you have side effects or because you simply forget to take your medications, talk to your doctor about solutions. **Don't change your treatment without your doctor's guidance.**

**If you have any questions about this topic, please reach out to CompassionLink at [info@compassionlink.org](mailto:info@compassionlink.org). We will be happy to answer your questions.**

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### Sources:

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