

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

What is hypertension?

Hypertension, often called high blood pressure, occurs when blood moving through your arteries places too much force against the artery walls. People are told they have high blood pressure if their blood pressure readings are repeatedly above normal for a long time. The measure of a high blood pressure reading is greater than or equal to 140/90 (read "140 over 90"). About 24% of people in the United States have high blood pressure.

How does it occur?

- In 90-95% of cases, the cause of high blood pressure is unknown.
- In 5-10% of cases, high blood pressure is a symptom of some other health problem.
- Some people are at greater risk than others for having high blood pressure. Risk factors include:
 - pre-hypertension, or higher than normal blood pressure (120-139/80-89)
 - family history of high blood pressure
 - being overweight
 - older adults
 - too much alcohol intake
 - African-American descent
 - diabetes
 - having had pre-eclampsia or eclampsia while pregnant
 - in some women use of oral contraceptive or "the pill"
 - some over-the-counter drugs can increase blood pressure. Read the label and ask your pharmacist about any over-the-counter drug before you take it.

What are the symptoms?

High blood pressure most often has no symptoms; it is a "silent" disease. It can go without being found until it has caused some damage to the body. The following symptoms may be produced by extremely high blood pressure, but they also frequently occur for other reasons. These symptoms include:

- Feeling tired
- Blurred Vision
- Feeling dizzy
- A Nosebleed
- Morning headache at the back of the head

How is it treated? Treatment for high blood pressure includes:

- **Taking your blood pressure at home:** Automated blood pressure monitors are now an option for home use. Keeping track of your blood pressure at home helps your doctor to measure how severe your high blood pressure is and if treatment is working. Your doctor can teach you how to measure your blood pressure at home.
- **Office visits** are needed so that your doctor can measure your blood pressure, adjust your treatment as needed, and check for side effects from your blood pressure pills.
- **The best blood pressure control:** Although high blood pressure cannot be cured, it can be controlled. High blood pressure that is not controlled can cause a heart attack, stroke, heart failure and kidney failure. Other factors that may hasten problems include smoking, diabetes, and

high cholesterol. The goals of treatment of high blood pressure are first to lower your blood pressure to a level as near normal as possible. Also, to reduce the risk of getting other health problems, your doctor may suggest changing your lifestyle and taking blood pressure pills.

How can I take care of myself? Some things you can do for yourself to improve your control of high blood pressure include:

Lifestyle changes:

- **Stop smoking:** Smoking damages and constricts your blood vessels and is, by itself, a risk factor for stroke and heart disease.
- **Reduce salt (sodium) intake** to < 2.4 grams per day. People vary in their response to salt intake. The salt intake guidelines are as follows:
 - Do not add salt to food at the table
 - Reduce or get rid of salt used in cooking
 - Limit processed and fast foods
 - Read package labels for amount of salt (sodium) in foods
- **Weight loss:** Losing weight, even just 10 pounds, often can decrease blood pressure
- **Exercise:** Exercise is a good way to control weight and reduce feeling anxious.. Thirty to forty-five minutes of brisk walking three to four times a week is often helpful to lower your blood pressure.
- **Reduce alcohol consumption:** Drinking more than one ounce of alcohol a day may increase blood pressure. One ounce of alcohol is contained in 2 oz. of 100 proof whiskey, 8 oz. (2 glasses) of wine or 24 oz.(2 bottles) of beer.

Medications (blood pressure pills)

There are a wide variety of pills available to treat high blood pressure. It is very important to take the pills your doctor orders on time and on a routine schedule. Some of these pills include:

- **Diuretics** (water pills) are often the first choice. They help the body get rid of excess water and salt.
- **Beta-Blockers** are pills that cause the heart to beat more slowly and relax blood vessels.
- **ACE Inhibitors, Calcium Channel Blockers, Angiotensin Receptor Blockers, and Alpha Blockers** are pills that relax blood vessels.

You should call your doctor if you have any of the symptoms listed below:

- Headaches feeling tired, or confused
- Numbness and tingling in hands and feet
- Coughing up blood or severe nosebleeds
- Shortness of breath
- New symptoms that you have after starting a new pill
- Chest pain
- Sudden, severe, headache without a certain cause
- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm and/or leg on one side of the body
- Sudden dimness or loss of vision
- Trouble speaking or understanding speech
- Feeling shaky or having a sudden fall