

KNOW THE FACTS ABOUT

High Blood Pressure



What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against your artery walls as it circulates through your body. Blood pressure normally rises and falls throughout the day, but it can cause health problems if it stays high for a long time. High blood pressure can lead to heart disease and stroke—leading causes of death in the United States.¹

Are you at risk?

About one in three U.S. adults—an estimated 68 million—has high blood pressure.² Anyone, including children, can develop it.

Several factors that are beyond your control can increase your risk for high blood pressure. These include your age, sex, and race or ethnicity. But you can work to reduce your risk by eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, and being physically active.

What are the signs and symptoms?

High blood pressure usually has no warning signs or symptoms, so many people don't realize they have it. That's why it's important to visit your doctor regularly. Be sure to talk with your doctor about having your blood pressure checked.

How is high blood pressure diagnosed?

Your doctor measures your blood pressure by wrapping an inflatable cuff with a pressure gauge around your arm to squeeze the blood vessels. Then he or she listens to your pulse with a stethoscope while releasing air from the cuff. The gauge measures the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart beats (systolic) and when it rests (diastolic).

How is it treated?

If you have high blood pressure, your doctor may prescribe medication to treat it. Lifestyle changes, such as the ones listed above, can be just as important as taking medicines. Talk with your doctor about the best ways to reduce your risk for high blood pressure.

¹ CDC: Deaths: Final Data for 2008. www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr59/nvsr59_10.pdf

² CDC: Vital signs: prevalence, treatment, and control of hypertension—United States, 1999–2002 and 2005–2008. www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6004a4.htm?s_cid=mm6004a4_w



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What blood pressure levels are healthy?

To determine whether your blood pressure is normal, your doctor examines your systolic and diastolic pressures, which the gauge measures in millimeters of mercury (abbreviated as mmHg).

	Blood Pressure Levels
Normal	systolic: less than 120 mmHg diastolic: less than 80 mmHg
At risk (prehypertension)	systolic: 120–139 mmHg diastolic: 80–89 mmHg
High	systolic: 140 mmHg or higher diastolic: 90 mmHg or higher

Can high blood pressure be prevented?

You can take several steps to maintain normal blood pressure levels:

- Get your blood pressure checked regularly.
- Eat a healthy diet. Tips on reducing saturated fat in your diet are available on the Web site for CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity. <http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/basics/fat/saturatedfat.html>
- Maintain a healthy weight. CDC's Healthy Weight Web site includes information and tools to help you lose weight. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/index.html>

- Be physically active. Visit CDC's Physical Activity Web site for more information on being active. <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/index.html>
- Limit alcohol use. See CDC's Alcohol and Public Health Web site for more information. <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol>
- Don't smoke. CDC's Office on Smoking and Health Web site has information on quitting smoking. <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco>
- Prevent or manage diabetes. Visit CDC's Diabetes Public Health Resource for more information. <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes>

For More Information

Learn more about high blood pressure at the following Web sites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/index.htm>
- American Heart Association: <http://www.americanheart.org>
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

