

Hypertension

What is hypertension?

Blood pressure is the amount of force on the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps blood. High blood pressure is when the force against the arteries is high enough that it can cause health problems.

What do the two blood pressure numbers mean?

The top number (systolic) is the pressure when your heart beats or is pumping blood. The bottom number (diastolic) is the pressure on the arteries when the heart is at rest between beats. Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80. Pre-hypertension is 120-139/80-89. Stage 1 high blood pressure is 140-159/90-99 and stage 2 high blood pressure is higher than 160/100.

What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

Most people with high blood pressure have no symptoms at all. Rarely people with hypertension can have a dull headache, some dizziness or nosebleeds. This is why high blood pressure is known as the “Silent Killer” as you can have high blood pressure for years without knowing it. During this time, damage can be done in many ways.

Who is at risk for hypertension?

High blood pressure has many risk factors including

- Age
- Race (more common in African Americans and tends to be more severe)
- Family history
- Being overweight
- Not being physically active
- Smoking (causes your vessels to constrict and chemicals damage the arteries)
- Eating too much salt and not enough potassium
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Stress
- People with certain medical conditions (thyroid, sleep apnea, kidney disease)
- People on certain medications (steroids for asthma, birth control, and cold relief products)

What are the complications of high blood pressure?

- Heart attack or stroke
- Aneurysm (when blood vessels weaken and bulge and then can rupture)
- Heart failure (the heart has hard time pumping blood)
- Arteries narrow (limits blood flow – causing kidney failure)
- Blood vessels in the eye burst and bleed (can cause blindness)

What can you do for high blood pressure?

- Eat a healthy diet (more fruits and vegetables, whole grains and less fat)
- Decrease the salt in your diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get more exercise
- Limit alcohol
- Don't smoke
- Manage stress
- Take your blood pressure medications as prescribed
- Keep medical appointments to monitor your blood pressure