

High blood pressure

According to recent estimates, nearly one in three U.S. adults has high blood pressure, also called hypertension.¹ In more than 90% of cases, the cause is unknown.²

Anyone can develop high blood pressure, but it's most commonly found in adults over the age of 35. Other at-risk groups include African Americans, obese people, heavy drinkers, pregnant women, postmenopausal women and women taking birth control pills.³ A person with high blood pressure generally won't notice any symptoms, so it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly to prevent damage to your brain, heart and kidneys.⁴

Even people who have not developed high blood pressure by age 55 have a 90% chance of developing it in the future, so it's a condition that most of us will have to deal with at some point in our lives.⁵

Effects of high blood pressure⁶

High blood pressure overburdens your circulatory system by forcing your heart to pump harder and your arteries to contain blood that's under greater pressure than what they're designed to withstand. Over time, this decreases the efficiency of your heart and arteries, putting other organs at risk.

If you have other medical issues like high cholesterol or diabetes, or if you smoke or are obese, high blood pressure greatly increases the odds that you'll develop heart disease or stroke. High blood pressure can also cause:

- Vision problems and blindness. High blood pressure can cause blood vessels in the eyes to rupture.
- Hardening of the arteries, which leads to heart and kidney damage and puts you at increased risk for stroke.
- Kidney damage and kidney failure. As the blood vessels of the kidneys narrow and thicken from the excessive force of your blood, the kidneys are less efficient. They filter less fluid, causing waste to build up in the blood. If your kidneys fail altogether, you'll need regular dialysis treatments or a kidney transplant.
- Heart attack. As the arteries narrow, less oxygen passes through your body to your heart, causing tissue damage, chest pain and heart attack if a total blockage occurs.
- Congestive heart failure. High blood pressure is the number-one risk factor for congestive heart failure, which occurs if the heart can't pump enough blood to supply the body's needs.

How can I control my blood pressure?

Because of the prevalence of high blood pressure, we should all take steps to protect our health. Have your blood pressure checked regularly, and know what reading is normal for you. Keep your weight at the low end of the “normal” body mass index (BMI) range for your height. Avoid too much salt, alcohol and saturated fat, and get adequate exercise each week. Also, don't use tobacco products.

DID YOU KNOW?

The cuff-and-squeezy-ball device used to measure blood pressure is called a sphygmomanometer. Impress your friends with that one at your next Scrabble tournament.

If you're diagnosed with high blood pressure, you may have to take medication. Be sure to follow your doctor's instructions. It's also important to know the ingredients in any over-the-counter cough, cold or flu medications you take, because decongestants interfere with blood pressure medications and can be very dangerous for a person with high blood pressure.³

American Heart Association recommended blood pressure levels

| Blood pressure category | Systolic (mm Hg) | | Diastolic (mm Hg) |
|---|------------------|-----|-------------------|
| Normal | less than 120 | and | less than 80 |
| Prehypertension | 120-130 | or | 80-89 |
| High blood pressure, stage 1 | 140-159 | or | 90-99 |
| High blood pressure, stage 2 | 160 or higher | or | 100 or higher |
| Hypertensive crisis (emergency care needed) | Higher than 180 | or | Higher than 110 |

Source: American Heart Association, *Understanding Blood Pressure Readings* (October 19, 2009): americanheart.org

Resources

Visit the American Heart Association at americanheart.org, and select “Diseases & Conditions/High Blood Pressure” to get information and tools, including a blood pressure quiz, risk calculator, online support forums and message boards or register to receive monthly educational e-mails with recipes and other tips for living with high blood pressure.

The information contained in this flier is provided for educational purposes only, and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please consult your doctor for medical advice about changes that may affect your health and before taking any medications or beginning any lifestyle program. Some services may not be covered under your health plan. Please refer to your Group Certificate and Schedule of Benefits for details concerning benefits, procedures and exclusions.

Visit anthem.com for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

Certain factual or statistical information was derived from the following sources:

¹National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, *Who Can Develop High Blood Pressure?* (accessed April 5, 2010): nhlbi.nih.gov ²American Heart Association, *High Blood Pressure Causes* (accessed April 5, 2010): americanheart.org ³American Heart Association, *High Blood Pressure, Factors that contribute to* (accessed April 5, 2010): americanheart.org ⁴WebMD, *Symptoms of High Blood Pressure* (March 6, 2009): webmd.com ⁵National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, *What are High Blood Pressure and Prehypertension?* (accessed April 5, 2010): nhlbi.nih.gov ⁶National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, *Effects of High Blood Pressure on Your Body* (accessed April 5, 2010): nhlbi.nih.gov ⁷National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, *What Is Blood Pressure?* (accessed April 2010): nhlbi.nih.gov/ihp/lp/bp.htm

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What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of your arteries. Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers – the systolic pressure (as the heart beats) over the diastolic pressure (as the heart relaxes between beats). The measurement is written one above or before the other, with the systolic number on top and the diastolic number on the bottom. For example, a blood pressure measurement of 120/80 mm Hg (millimeters of mercury) is expressed verbally as “120 over 80.” Normal blood pressure is less than 120 mm Hg systolic and less than 80 mm Hg diastolic.⁷



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