

How can high blood pressure be controlled?

In almost all cases, hypertension can be managed and the health risks controlled through a combination of medication and simple lifestyle changes.

For example:

See your doctor - Only a doctor can properly diagnose the condition and prescribe a course of action to control high blood pressure.

Diet - To help control your weight, eat a healthy, well-balanced diet and limit the amount of fats you eat, particularly saturated fats. People with hypertension should also limit their intake of sodium (salt). Your doctor and a dietician can work with you to determine a diet that best suits your health needs.***

Smoking - Cigarettes and other tobacco products constrict blood vessels, make your heart beat faster and cause blood pressure to rise, resulting in damage to the walls of your arteries.

Exercise - Just 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as walking, three to four times a week can help you lose weight, control your cholesterol level, reduce stress and decrease the health risks associated with high blood pressure.

According to recent government guidelines, people with blood pressure readings between 120/80 and 140/90 are now considered "prehypertensive."

NOTE: Always consult your physician before beginning any exercise program.

*** For more information about Senior Nutrition, order our complimentary pamphlet entitled, "Senior Nutrition: Maintaining Health through Good Nutrition."

Medication - There are many drugs available that work to reduce hypertension. Some rid the body of excess water and sodium; some open narrowed blood vessels and others prevent blood vessels from constricting. Regardless of what type of medication your doctor prescribes, it is up to you to learn all of the facts about your medication, including how to store it, when to take it, what the side effects are, and how it reacts with other medications. Most importantly, you must remember to take your medication according to the prescribed schedule.

Check your blood pressure regularly - Whether you have high blood pressure or not, it is important to have your blood pressure checked on a regular basis. It is quick, easy and inexpensive. There is no other way to know if you have hypertension and whether what you are doing is having the desired effect.



Additional resources

There are many excellent resources available for more information about high blood pressure and related health risks. Here are just a few:

American Heart Association

1689 East 115th Street
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-7500
www.americanheart.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

200 Independence Avenue, SW, Room #746-G
Washington, DC 20201
202-690-8598
www.cdc.gov

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

P.O. Box 30105, Bethesda, MD 20824
301-592-8573

To order additional complimentary copies of this pamphlet, call 815-964-2200.

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High Blood Pressure

Learn the Facts and Reduce the Risks



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What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a chronic, but manageable health condition. Although there is no “cure” for high blood pressure, there are many steps that can be taken to control it and prevent further complications. High blood pressure occurs when the force or “pressure” of the blood flowing through the arteries is above normal levels. When that happens, the heart must work harder to circulate the blood throughout the body, which causes stress on the arteries. If left untreated over time, the continuing stress on the heart and arteries can contribute to a number of serious and potentially life-threatening health problems.

What are the complications of high blood pressure?

Among the many problems attributable to high blood pressure are:

Stroke - Stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain gets clogged or bursts, which can result in paralysis or death. People with hypertension are up to seven times more likely to have a stroke than those without the condition.*

Congestive Heart Failure -

This problem occurs when the heart cannot pump enough blood to meet the needs of the body's other organs. Although the heart might continue working, a person experiencing heart failure may develop shortness of breath and swelling throughout the body.

Research shows that even subtle disruptions in kidney function play a role in most cases of high blood pressure.

Heart Attack – With high blood pressure you are three times more likely to develop coronary artery disease, which can lead to a heart attack. A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to part of the heart is severely reduced or stopped. Over a prolonged period of time, the muscle can suffer irreversible injury, resulting in disability or death.

Other problems attributable to unmanaged hypertension include kidney failure, damage to the eyes and hardening of the arteries. The key to preventing all of these serious conditions is early diagnosis and careful monitoring and management.



What are the causes of high blood pressure?

In 90 to 95 percent of all high blood pressure cases, the cause is unknown. However, there are several key risk factors that either alone, or in combination, are associated with the disease. They include:

Race - African Americans on average are more likely to develop high blood pressure than Caucasians.

Since blood vessels constrict in cold weather, people with high blood pressure should take particular care to dress warmly during the winter months.

Heredity - If your parents or close relatives have high blood pressure, you are more likely to develop it.

Age - High blood pressure occurs most often in people over 35. The older you get, the higher your risk.**

Obesity - Weight in excess of 30 percent of a person's ideal body weight.

Salt - A diet that is high in sodium.

Alcohol - Heavy and regular use of alcohol.

Lack of Exercise - Inactivity can contribute to being overweight and lead to high blood pressure.

Stress - Although difficult to measure, a stressful lifestyle can also increase risk.

How do you know if you have high blood pressure?

Unfortunately, there are no true “symptoms” of high blood pressure. Many people can have the condition without knowing it. In fact, it is estimated that one out of four American adults have high blood pressure, yet 30 percent of them have not been diagnosed.



That is why it is so important to visit your doctor at least once a year to have your blood pressure checked. The sooner hypertension is diagnosed, the better the chances are of controlling the condition and limiting any associated complications.

* For more information about Stroke, order our complimentary pamphlet entitled, “Understanding Stroke: A Leading Cause of Death and Disability.”

** For more information about Healthy Aging, order our complimentary pamphlet entitled, “Living Better Longer: Helpful Hints for Healthy Aging.”