



# HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

## ***What is blood pressure?***

As you know, the heart pumps blood to all parts of the body through the veins and arteries. When blood travels through the arteries and veins, it creates a force against the walls called blood pressure. When blood pressure gets high, it makes the heart work harder to pump blood. This helps cause hardening of the arteries.

## ***How is blood pressure tested?***

Blood pressure is tested with a machine called a blood pressure cuff. A band is wrapped around the arm, which is inflated with a pump. The doctor or nurse listens at the elbow for the sound of the blood going through the artery as the air is let out of the cuff. A dial shows numbers that the doctor or nurse use to find the blood pressure. Normal and abnormal blood pressure readings are:

- Normal: Less than 120/80
- Prehypertension: 120-139/80-89
- Stage 1 hypertension: 140-159/90-99
- Stage 2 hypertension: 160 and above/100 and above

Many stores like drug stores have blood pressure machines. Your arm is put through a hard plastic ring and the blood pressure is read through that. If your blood pressure is higher than normal, see your doctor about ways to lower it.

## ***Who gets high blood pressure?***

Certain things about a person and what they do can play a role in developing high blood pressure. Below are some of those things:

- Smoking
- Obesity
- Lack of physical activity
- Too much salt in the diet
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Stress
- Older age
- Genetics (passed on in families)

## ***What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?***

High blood pressure is often called the "silent killer". It has no symptoms unless it is so bad that a person's life is in danger from it. About a third of the people who have it do not even know they have it! If the blood pressure is extremely high, a person can suffer from the following symptoms:

- Severe headache
- Fatigue or confusion
- Vision problems
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Irregular heartbeat
- Blood in the urine

If you have any of these symptoms, you should see your doctor immediately. These symptoms along with high blood pressure could lead to a heart attack or stroke.

### ***What could happen if blood pressure stays high?***

If high blood pressure stays too high, it can lead to many other serious illnesses. The extra pressure on the arteries causes damage, leading to hardening of the arteries, heart disease and heart failure. People with high blood pressure are four times more likely to have a stroke, or “brain attack.” This is similar to a heart attack in that the blood supply is cut off from the brain. The lack of sugar and nutrients getting to the brain can lead to death of the brain cells. This can cause permanent brain damage. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can also lead to kidney failure and eye disease.

### ***High blood pressure can be avoided.***

Positive lifestyle changes can prevent high blood pressure:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get regular exercise
- Watch salt intake
- Drink alcohol in moderation
- Reduce stress

There are vitamin and mineral supplements that can help. Talk to your doctor about them to see if taking them might be right for you.

### ***Treating high blood pressure***

Lifestyle changes such as those above are very important in treating high blood pressure. Losing weight, reducing salt intake, and exercising all go a long way in lowering blood pressure and preventing more serious illnesses. If these changes alone do not work, there are medications that can help. See your doctor to talk about which one is right for you. And remember, regular follow-up with your doctor is vital in keeping blood pressure under control.

