

Focus on:

# High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

REFERENCE



## Overview

Blood pressure is the amount of force in your arteries when the heart beats (systolic pressure) and when the heart is at rest (diastolic pressure). High blood pressure (or hypertension) is when your blood pressure is greater than or equal to 140 mm Hg systolic pressure or greater than or equal to 90 mm Hg diastolic pressure. Hypertension directly increases the risk of coronary heart disease, which can lead to a heart attack and stroke.

According to the American Heart Association (AHA) "One in four adult Americans has high blood pressure, and nearly one-third of them don't know they have it."

Hypertension can occur in children or adults, but it's more common among people over the age of 35. It's particularly prevalent in African- Americans, middle-aged and elderly people, obese people, heavy drinkers and women who are taking birth control pills. It may run in families, but many people with a strong family history of high blood pressure don't have it. People with diabetes, gout or kidney disease are also more likely to have hypertension.

## Causes

Usually, the cause of hypertension is unknown. You can have hypertension for years without knowing it. This is why it is known as the silent killer. It is important to get your blood pressure checked by your doctor. The test is quick and painless and can be done in your doctor's office, hospital clinic, school, nurse's office, company clinic or at a health fair.

When the cause is unknown, it is called essential or primary hypertension. When the cause is known, it is called secondary hypertension, and may include causes like kidney abnormality, a congenital structural abnormality of the aorta, (large blood vessel leaving the heart) and narrowing of certain arteries. Remember, these problems can be corrected, so ask your doctor on your next visit.

## Factors That May Contribute to Hypertension

Though doctors don't know what exactly causes hypertension, they do know about some controllable and uncontrollable factors that can contribute to your risk of developing hypertension. According to the AHA, controllable risk factors include:

- **Obesity** – People with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher are more likely to develop hypertension



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# High Blood Pressure Continued...

- > **Eating Too Much Salt** – A high sodium intake increases blood pressure in some people
- > **Alcohol** – Heavy and regular use of alcohol can increase blood pressure dramatically
- > **Lack of Physical Activity** – An inactive lifestyle makes it easier to become overweight and increases the chance of high blood pressure
- > **Stress** – This is often mentioned as a risk factor, but stress levels are hard to measure, and responses to stress vary from person to person
- > **Reducing your alcohol intake**
- > **Medications** – your doctor will decide whether you need medicine in addition to dietary and lifestyle changes

**“Hypertension is a life-long disease, but it can be controlled. By controlling your blood pressure, you lower your risk of a heart attack, stroke and kidney disease.”**

Uncontrollable risk factors include:

- > **Race** – African-Americans develop high blood pressure more often than whites, and it tends to occur earlier and be more severe.
- > **Heredity** – If your parents or other close blood relatives have high blood pressure, you’re more likely to develop it.
- > **Age** – In general, the older you get, the greater your chance of developing high blood pressure. It occurs most often in people over age 35. Men seem to develop it most often between age 35 and 55. Women are more likely to develop it after menopause.

**For more information on hypertension, visit the following Web sites:**

- > **The American Heart Association:**  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)
- > **National Institutes of Health:**  
[www.nih.org](http://www.nih.org)

**For more information about Nationwide Better Health visit [nwbetterhealth.com](http://nwbetterhealth.com). Or contact your benefits representative.**

**TIPS**



**What Can I Do To Lower My Risk?**

Hypertension is a life-long disease, but it can be controlled. By controlling your blood pressure, you lower your risk of a heart attack, stroke and kidney disease. Your doctor may recommend the following lifestyle changes to help your hypertension:

- > Eating a low-fat, low-salt diet, and changes in your living habits such as losing weight and getting more exercise
- > Quitting smoking is also important to reduce your overall risk for heart attack and stroke

**American Heart Association Recommended Blood Pressure Levels**

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic (mm Hg)	Diastolic (mm Hg)
Normal	< 120	<80
Prehypertension	120-139	80-89
Stage 1	140-159	90-99
Stage 2	160 <sup>+</sup>	100 <sup>+</sup>

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