



High Blood Pressure 101

By Ilana Roberts
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High blood pressure is one of the leading contributors to heart disease, stroke and kidney disease in the US. According to the American Heart Association 1 in 3 Americans over 20, or about 80 million people, have high blood pressure, though many never notice their symptoms.

Regular screening is important to identify high blood pressure, and consultation with a doctor can help determine small steps that can yield a large improvement.

Blood pressure is the force of blood against your artery walls as it circulates through your body. Blood pressure rises and falls normally throughout the day. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is when the blood pressure remains too high for too long.

Reducing risk

While age, gender, and ethnicity can affect risk for high blood pressure, many steps can be taken to reduce your risk.

- **Eat healthy:** Choose a diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products. Avoid excessive salt by choosing food products with a percent daily value of sodium lower than 5%. Use salt-free seasoning and rinse canned vegetables well before use to reduce sodium content. Picking leaner meats like fish or chicken over red meat and limiting sweets and sugary drinks can also help.
- **Remain active:** Aim for 30 minutes of continuous activity for at least four days a week, such as going for a walk or swimming. Aerobic activity is one step towards a healthy heart and lowering your blood pressure
- **Cut out unhealthy habits:** Quit smoking or using other tobacco products. One of the many ill-effects tobacco has on health is increased blood pressure. Limiting alcoholic beverages to fewer than two per night is also important in lowering blood pressure.
- **Monitor yourself:** Managing your other health conditions, such as diabetes, is important to help control hypertension.
- **Weight loss:** If you're overweight even a moderate amount of weight loss can help lower your blood pressure

What to expect

When a physician measures your blood pressure they will tell you two numbers, for example 145/90. The first number is known as the systolic pressure, or the pressure in your arteries when the heart is contracting. The lower number is the diastolic pressure, the pressure in your arteries when your heart



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is relaxing. Hypertension is defined as a blood pressure of 140/90 or greater, but your physician might have a goal blood pressure specifically for you.

If your blood pressure remains high your doctor may prescribe medication. It is important to take that medication regularly. Even if the medication causes side effects, it is important to continue taking the medication, but tell your health care provider about the problem immediately so that adjustments can be made.

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