



## High Blood Pressure

Blood pressure results from two forces. One is created by the heart as it pumps blood into the arteries and through the circulatory system. The other is the force of the arteries as they resist the blood flow.

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers. Systolic pressure (the higher number) is the pressure while the heart is beating. Diastolic pressure is the pressure when the heart is resting between beats. If your systolic pressure is 140 mm Hg or more (or both) when measured on two or more occasions, then you have high blood pressure. Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg. Blood pressure of 120/80 to 139/89 is considered prehypertension.

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, usually has no symptoms. That's why it's often called the "silent killer." The only way to find out if you have this disease is to have your blood pressure measured with a simple, painless test.

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for both heart attack and stroke. High blood pressure causes the heart to work harder than normal. That means the heart and arteries are more prone to injury. High blood pressure raises your risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, and heart failure.

In most cases, the cause of high blood pressure is not known. However, several factors increase the chance of having high blood pressure:

- **Age** – The older you get, the higher your blood pressure tends to be.
- **Family history** – People whose parents have high blood pressure are more likely to develop it than those whose parents don't.
- **Excess weight** – Weight is one of the avoidable risk factors for high blood pressure. Too many calories, combined with an inactive lifestyle, can lead to overweight and obesity, a major factor for coronary heart disease.
- **Alcohol** – Drinking too much alcohol also increases a person's risk of having high blood pressure.
- **Sodium** – A diet high in salt may be a factor for "sodium-sensitive" people. Most Americans consume much more salt than their bodies need.

If you have high blood pressure, your doctor will prescribe eating plenty of fruits and vegetables along with nonfat dairy products, losing weight, exercising regularly, restricting salt (sodium) intake, and possibly taking medication. These steps will help lower blood pressure.

### Blood pressure classification for adults age 18 and older

Category	Systolic (mm Hg)		Diastolic (mm Hg)
Normal*	less than 120	and	less than 80
Prehypertension	120 – 139	or	80 - 89
Hypertension, Stage 1	140 – 159	or	90 - 99
Hypertension, Stage 2	160 or higher	or	100 or higher

\*Unusually low reading should be evaluated for clinical significance.

Source: American Heart Association

**To learn more about controlling your risk factors, visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org).**