

Blood Pressure: What You Should Know



More than 65 million people in the United States have high blood pressure. Another 59 million people have pre-hypertension, which increases their chances of developing high blood pressure.

The good news is that you can prevent and control high blood pressure. Losing weight, if necessary, trying more heart healthy foods and being physically active are small, but important steps you can take that can help you prevent or control high blood pressure.

What Is Normal Blood Pressure?

A blood pressure reading below 120/80 is considered normal. Generally, lower is better. However, very low blood pressures can sometimes be a cause for concern and should be checked out by your health care provider.

Doctors classify blood pressures under 140/90 as either "normal," or "pre-hypertension."

- "Normal" blood pressures are lower than 120/80.
- "Pre-hypertension" is blood pressure between 120 and 139 for the top number, or between 80 and 89 for the bottom number. For example, blood pressure readings of 138/82, 128/89, or 130/86 are all in the "pre-hypertension" range. If your blood pressure is in the pre-hypertension range, it is more likely that you will end up with high blood pressure unless you act to prevent it.

What Is High Blood Pressure?

A blood pressure of 140/90 or higher is considered high blood pressure –another name for hypertension.

Both numbers are important. If one or both numbers remain high over a period of time, you have high blood pressure. If you are being treated for high blood pressure, you still have high blood pressure even if you have repeated readings in the normal range.

There are two levels of high blood pressure: Stage 1 and Stage 2

- Stage 1 is a systolic pressure ranging from 140 to 159 or a diastolic pressure ranging from 90 to 99.
- Stage 2 is the most severe hypertension. It a systolic pressure of 160 or higher or a diastolic pressure of 100 or higher.

Only one of the numbers – the top or the bottom – needs to be high for you to have pre-hypertension or high blood pressure.

Who Gets High Blood Pressure?

Many people get high blood pressure as they get older. Over half of all Americans age 60 and older have high blood pressure. This is not a part of healthy aging! There are things you can do to help keep your blood pressure normal, such as eating a healthy diet and getting more exercise.

Please see reverse

How Can You Prevent High Blood Pressure?

Everyone can lower his or her chances of developing high blood pressure! Here's how:

- Keeping a healthy weight, lose weight if you are overweight
- Being physically active
- Following a healthy eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods.
- Choosing and preparing foods with less salt and sodium
- Drinking alcohol in moderation if you drink.

Another important measure for your health is to not smoke. Cigarette smoking increases your risk of heart attack and stroke and stopping is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and your family.

The DASH Eating Plan Can Help Prevent and Lower High Blood Pressure

People with high blood pressure can lower their blood pressure within a month by following the DASH eating plan that emphasizes:

- 8 to 10 servings a day of fruits and vegetables
- 2 to 3 servings a day of low-fat dairy foods as part of a healthy diet low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and total fat.
- Moderate amounts of whole grains, fish, poultry and nuts
- Limited amounts of red meat, sweets, and sugar-containing beverages.

The DASH Study showed that the eating plan was beneficial to both:

Persons with high blood pressure

Persons wishing to prevent high blood pressure.

For more information on the DASH eating plan, visit the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute web-site at www.nhlbi.nih.gov and SEARCH for "DASH".

Additional Resources

Nebraska Office of Women's Health

www.hhss.ne.gov/womenshealth

American Heart Association

www.americanheart.org

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

www.nhlbi.nih.gov

For More Information:

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