

Let's Talk About High Blood Pressure and Stroke

What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure means that the force of the blood pushing against the sides of your arteries is consistently in the high range. This is not normal. It can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure.

Two numbers represent blood pressure. The higher (systolic) number shows the pressure while the heart is beating. The lower (diastolic) number shows the pressure when the heart is resting between beats. The systolic number is always listed first.

A blood pressure reading of less than 120 over 80 is considered normal for adults. A blood pressure reading equal to or higher than 140 over 90 is high. Blood pressure between 120–139/80–89 is considered “prehypertension” and requires lifestyle modifications to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.



Having hypertension does not mean that you're tense, nervous or hyperactive. You can be calm and relaxed and still have high blood pressure. You usually can't tell if you have it. The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have it checked regularly by your doctor.

Who is at higher risk?

- People with a family history of high blood pressure
- African Americans
- People 35 years or older
- People who are overweight or obese
- People who smoke
- People who eat too much salt
- People who drink too much alcohol
- Women who use birth control pills
- People who aren't physically active
- Pregnant women

What should I do to control high blood pressure?

Even if you have had a prior stroke or heart attack, controlling high blood pressure can help prevent another one. Take these steps:

- Lose weight if you're overweight.
- Eat a healthy diet that's low in salt, saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol.
- Eat fruits and vegetables, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products.
- Enjoy regular physical activity.
- Limit alcohol to no more than two drinks a day if you're a man and one drink a day if you're a woman. Check with your doctor about drinking alcohol; it can raise blood pressure.
- Take medicine as prescribed.
- Know what your blood pressure should be and try to keep it at that level.

How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets.
- For more information about stroke, or to get more fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at StrokeAssociation.org.
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American

Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) and:

- ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers trained to answer your questions and offer support.
- ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area.
- ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection*, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider:

Will I always have to take my medicine?

How often should my blood pressure be checked?

What should my blood pressure be?

