

# High Blood Pressure: Common Questions



## What is high blood pressure?

- ★ High blood pressure (also called hypertension) is a condition that puts you at risk for heart attack, stroke, and kidney disease.

## How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

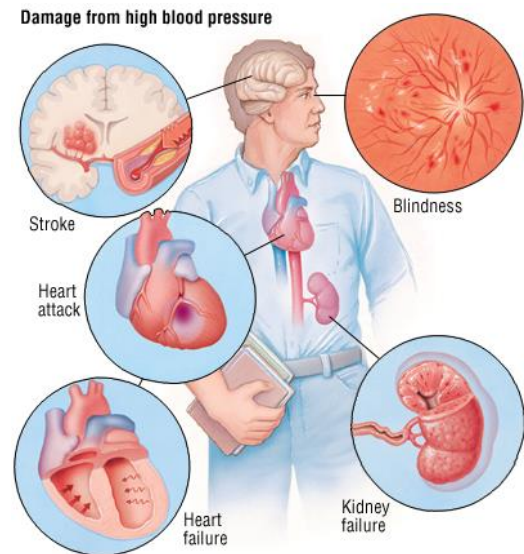
- ★ When your doctor or nurse tells you your blood pressure, he or she will say 2 numbers. For instance, your doctor or nurse might say that your blood pressure is "140 over 90."
  - The top number is the pressure inside your arteries when your heart is contracting.
  - The bottom number is the pressure inside your arteries when your heart is relaxed.
- ★ This chart shows how doctors diagnose blood pressure:

Level	Top number	Bottom number
High	140 or above	90 or above
Prehypertension	120 to 139	80 to 89
Normal	119 or below	79 or below

- ★ "**Prehypertension**" is a term doctors or nurses use as a warning. People with prehypertension do not yet have high blood pressure. But their blood pressure is not as low as it should be for good health.

## What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

- ★ High blood pressure usually does not have short term symptoms, but it can increase the risk of:
  - Stroke
  - Heart attack
  - Heart failure
  - Blindness
  - Kidney failure



## How is high blood pressure treated?

- ★ Lifestyle changes! (see below)
- ★ Medication (your doctors will help you decide if you should be taking medications)

## How can I lower my blood pressure?

- ★ Reduce the amount of salt you eat
  - The most important thing you can do to cut down on salt is to eat less processed food. That means that you should avoid most foods that are sold in cans, boxes, jars, and bags. You should also eat in restaurants less often.
- ★ Choose a diet low in fat and rich in vegetables, fruits and low-fat dairy products (DASH diet)
- ★ Cut down on alcohol (if you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks per day)
- ★ Lose weight - start with a 5-10% weight loss goal

- ★ Do something active for at least 30 minutes a day on most days of the week
  - Try to engage in moderate to vigorous activity. Moderate activity means you are getting slightly out of breath during the activity.
- ★ Get a home blood pressure meter. People who check their own blood pressure at home do better at keeping it low and can sometimes even reduce the amount of medicine they take
- ★ Don't get overwhelmed by this list! By making small changes and setting concrete goals you will see you can change quite a bit over time.

### Lifestyle modifications in the management of hypertension

Modification	Recommendation	Approximate systolic BP reduction, range*
Weight reduction	Maintain normal body weight (BMI, 18.5 to 24.9 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	5 to 20 mmHg per 10 kg weight loss
Adopt DASH eating plan	Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products with a reduced content of saturated and total fat	8 to 14 mmHg
Dietary sodium reduction	Reduce dietary sodium intake to no more than 100 meq/day (2.4 g sodium or 6 g sodium chloride)	2 to 8 mmHg
Physical activity	Engage in regular aerobic physical activity such as brisk walking (at least 30 minutes per day, most days of the week)	4 to 9 mmHg
Moderation of alcohol consumption	Limit consumption to no more than 2 drinks per day in most men and no more than 1 drink per day in women and lighter-weight persons	2 to 4 mmHg

For overall cardiovascular risk reduction, stop smoking. The effects of implementing these modifications are dose and time dependent and could be higher for some individuals; they are not all additive.

BMI: body mass index; BP: blood pressure; DASH: Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension.