

Hypertension

Hypertension—high blood pressure—has no symptoms. It is very common and affects people of all ages. Left untreated, it may cause stroke, myocardial infarction (heart attack), heart failure, kidney failure and blindness.

What may cause it to be high:

- Family history
- Being overweight
- Lack of exercise
- Lack of calcium and magnesium

Get tested!

Who: Everyone!

When: Periodic measurements after age 3. Every 2 years for normal adults

By Whom: Doctors, nurses, trained medical personnel

What it means:

A normal blood pressure is 120/80 mmHg (average). The top number (systolic) measures the force in the arteries when your heart pumps. Levels above 140/90 are generally thought to require medical treatment.

The bottom number (diastolic) measures the pressure when your heart is between pumps.

What you can do if it's high:

- ❖ **Lose weight if overweight.** Just 10 extra pounds requires an additional mile of blood vessels causing your heart to work even harder.
- ❖ **Stop smoking.** Smoking damages vessels and causes them to constrict which increases pressure.
- ❖ **Exercise.** Aerobically (walking, biking, jogging) at least 20 to 30 minutes, three times per week to strengthen your heart muscle and burn excess calories.
- ❖ **Avoid excess caffeine.** More than 2-3 cups of coffee or other caffeinated drink can raise blood pressure by constricting blood vessels.
- ❖ **Avoid too much alcohol.** People who consume more than 4 beers or 4 oz. of liquor per day are more likely to have high blood pressure. Reducing the amount or cutting it out completely usually lowers blood pressure.
- ❖ **Watch the salt.** Salt causes you to retain fluid which means your heart has even more blood to pump.

- ❖ **Watch the fat.** Fat in your diet can cause weight gain and can lead to plaque deposits in your arteries, which means a smaller opening for the blood your heart pumps and the pressure goes up. Men should generally limit their intake to 40-60 grams per day and women 20-40 grams per day.
- ❖ **Increase your calcium intake** to the equivalent of 3 cups of milk per day (1000 mg).
- ❖ **If you are on medication,** never stop taking it without consulting your doctor or nurse practitioner.