

Hypertension



What is High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure normally rises and falls. When the blood pressure is elevated over time, it is called high blood pressure. Any person can develop hypertension, which is the technical term for high blood pressure. Blood pressure measures the force of the blood flowing through your blood vessels when the heart contracts to pump blood and when the heart rests between beats. In people with hypertension, the tension within the blood vessels is greater, which makes the heart work harder.

Hypertension has been called the "silent killer" because it can cause damage to many body organs without any symptoms. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can cause a heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, vision problems and even death.

Statistics

- About 73.6 million people in the United States age 20 and older have high blood pressure. This is equivalent to approximately 1 in 3 adults.
- Of those people with high blood pressure, 78.7 percent were aware of their condition.
- Of all people with high blood pressure, 69.1 percent were under current treatment, 45.4 percent had it under control, and 54.6 percent did not have it controlled.
- The cause of 90–95 percent of the cases of high blood pressure isn't known; however, high blood pressure is easily detected and usually controllable.
- From 1995 to 2005 the death rate from high blood pressure increased 25.2 percent, and the actual number of deaths rose 56.4 percent.
- Non-Hispanic blacks are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure than are non-Hispanic whites.
- Within the African-American community, those with the highest rates of hypertension, are more likely to be middle aged or older, less educated, overweight or obese, physically inactive, and to have diabetes.
- In 2005 the death rates per 100,000 population from high blood pressure were 15.8 for white males, 52.1 for black males, 15.1 for white females and 40.3 for black females.

How Can I Control My Blood Pressure?

- **Know your numbers.** Having your blood pressure checked is easy and painless. Every effort should be made to keep your blood pressure below 120/80.
- **Visit your healthcare provider.** If you do not have high blood pressure, be sure to be checked at least once per year. If you do have high blood pressure, it should be checked more often, as your healthcare provider recommends.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Choose foods lower in fat and calories. Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. Cook foods by broiling, grilling or boiling rather than frying. Eat less salt in both foods you cook and prepared foods you buy. If you plan to lose weight, try to lose it slowly, about one half to one pound per week.
- **Be physically active.** Begin a moderate level of activity such as 30 minutes of brisk walking, bicycling, dancing or gardening. It is best to do this activity every day, but you can divide the 30 minutes into 10 minutes segments throughout the day. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Get off the bus one or two stops early. Be sure to check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise or activity.
- **Cut back on alcoholic beverages.** Drinking too much alcohol raises blood pressure. It also adds calories that may make losing weight harder. If you drink, it should be a moderate amount and in a responsible manner.
- **Stop smoking.** Smoking makes the heart work harder. Kicking the smoking habit is hard, but the payoff is reduced chances of high blood pressure and other diseases, and an improved quality of life.



For more information about blood pressure and cardiovascular health, contact UHS at 5-2542

