

What you should know about high blood pressure



Did you know?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against your blood vessels. High blood pressure (hypertension) is bad for your health because it makes your heart work harder than it should. High blood pressure can damage your heart, blood vessels, kidneys, eyes, and other organs and can lead to heart disease. There are steps you can take to lower your blood pressure and stop this damage.

Get a blood pressure screening

It is important to know your blood pressure numbers. You should get your blood pressure checked at least once a year to find out if you have high blood pressure. You can get a blood pressure screening at your doctor's office, at a health clinic, and at some health fairs.

Understand your blood pressure numbers

Your blood pressure results include two numbers. The top number is the pressure when your heart beats (systolic). The bottom number is the pressure when your heart is between beats (diastolic). If your blood pressure is 120/80 mmHg, you say that it is "120 over 80." A blood pressure reading below 120/80 mmHg is considered normal for a healthy person. A blood pressure number of 140/90 or above is considered high.

Steps you can take to lower your blood pressure

- **Exercise.** Try to get 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week. You don't have to go to the gym to get exercise and you don't have to do it all at once—three 10 minute sessions are just as good. Gardening, riding a bike, raking leaves, and walking at a brisk pace all count towards your 30 minutes.
- **Eat a heart healthy diet.** Avoid salt and saturated (animal) fat. Use herbs and spices to flavor your food. Make healthy meal choices by including fruit, vegetables, whole grains, fish, poultry, nuts, and low-fat dairy products in your meals.
- **Avoid alcohol and tobacco.** Having two or more alcoholic drinks a day can raise your blood pressure. If you smoke, quit. Using tobacco increases your risk for high blood pressure and other health problems.
- **Ask your doctor about blood pressure medicines.** There are medicines that can help you control your blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, talk to your doctor to see what medicines may be right for you.

Call a Health Coach

Available by phone 24/7, a Health Coach can provide more information to help you understand your blood pressure numbers. A Health Coach can help you create a plan to work with your doctor to manage your blood pressure. Call a Health Coach at 1-800-ASK BLUE (275-2583).