



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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High Blood Pressure

What is high blood pressure?

Hypertension or **High Blood Pressure** is a consistently elevated blood pressure of 139 mm Hg (millimeters of mercury) systolic and/or 89 mm Hg diastolic or higher.

- The **systolic** pressure, the *top* number is the higher pressure and is measured during the contraction of the heart.
- The **diastolic** pressure is the *bottom* number and it occurs when the heart is relaxed between beats.
- A blood pressure reading of **119/79** and below is considered to be in the normal range for an adult.
- A blood pressure reading of **120/80 -139/89** falls in a new category of pre-hypertension and should be monitored closely.

Who is at risk?

There are several factors that increase the chance of having high blood pressure. It is particularly prevalent in:

- African Americans,
- middle aged and elderly people,
- obese people,
- heavy alcohol drinkers,
- people with diabetes mellitus, gout, or kidney disease, and
- people whose parents and other relatives have had high blood pressure.

High blood pressure cannot be cured but it can be controlled.

Symptoms

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms and is often called the "**Silent Killer**". Some people have high blood pressure and are not even aware of it. By the time a person has been diagnosed with High Blood Pressure, his/her heart vessels may be damaged and if left untreated may affect such organs as the:

- heart,
- brain,
- kidneys, or
- eyes may be affected.

High Blood Pressure can cause:

- stroke,
- heart failure,
- kidney failure, or
- eye problems.

People with normal blood pressure should have it checked **at least once every two years**. If your blood pressure is near the top of the normal range or if you have a family history of high blood pressure you may need it checked more often.

Treatment

A combined treatment of:

- diet,
- exercise, and
- medication as prescribed by your doctor can bring your blood pressure under control.

Losing 10-20 lbs can greatly affect your blood pressure. A moderate form of continuous exercise such as walking 1/2 hour each day is a good way to start.

Reducing sodium or salt consumption may help lower blood pressure in some people. This will mean avoiding salty foods and cutting down on the amount of salt you use in cooking and at the table.

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