

# High Blood Pressure

## What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against your artery walls as it circulates through your body. Blood pressure normally rises and falls throughout the day, but it can cause health problems if it stays high for a long time. High blood pressure can lead to heart disease and stroke—leading causes of death in the United States.

## Are you at risk?

One in three American adults has high blood pressure—that’s an estimated 67 million people. Anyone, including children, can develop it. Several factors that are beyond your control can increase your risk for high blood pressure. These include your age, sex, and race or ethnicity. But you can work to reduce your risk by eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, and being physically active.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

High blood pressure usually has no warning signs or symptoms, so many people don’t realize they have it. That’s why it’s important to visit your doctor regularly. Be sure to talk with your doctor about having your blood pressure checked.

## How is high blood pressure diagnosed?

Your doctor measures your blood pressure by wrapping an inflatable cuff with a pressure gauge around your arm to squeeze the blood vessels. Then he or she listens to your pulse with a stethoscope while releasing air from the cuff. The gauge measures the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart beats (systolic) and when it rests (diastolic).

## What blood pressure levels are healthy?

To determine whether your blood pressure is normal, your doctor examines your systolic and diastolic pressures, which the gauge measures in millimeters of mercury (abbreviated as mmHg).

### Blood Pressure Levels

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Normal                    | systolic: less than 120 mmHg<br>diastolic: less than 80 mmHg |
| At risk (prehypertension) | systolic: 120–139 mmHg<br>diastolic: 80–89 mmHg              |
| High                      | systolic: 140 mmHg or higher<br>diastolic: 90 mmHg or higher |

## How is it treated?

If you have high blood pressure, your doctor may prescribe medication to treat it. Lifestyle changes, such as the ones listed above, can be just as important as taking medicines. Talk with your doctor about the best ways to reduce your risk for high blood pressure.