

High Blood Pressure

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the amount of pressure inside a type of blood vessels called arteries. When the heart beats, it squeezes to push blood through the blood vessels. Then it relaxes so it can fill up with blood for the next squeeze. Blood pressure has two parts:

The top number is called the systolic pressure. This is the pressure when the heart is pumping. The bottom number is called the diastolic pressure. This is the pressure when the heart is relaxing.

Both numbers are important. Your doctor wants both numbers to be normal.

What is a normal blood pressure?

The normal blood pressure for children depends on age and height. Your doctor will tell you what a normal blood pressure is for your child.

For adults a normal blood pressure is typically less than 140/90. If you have diabetes or other chronic diseases, your doctor may want your blood pressure less than 130/80.

What causes high blood Pressure?

There are many things which can cause high blood pressure or hypertension:

- Many kidney diseases cause high blood pressure.
- Having urinary infections or some other condition that injured the kidneys in the past can cause high blood pressure.
- Disorders of some of the glands in the body (the thyroid and adrenal glands) can cause high blood pressure.
- A narrowing in the aorta (a large blood vessel coming from the heart) or in one of the blood vessels going to the kidneys can cause high blood pressure.
- Being overweight can cause high blood pressure.
- Many people have hypertension without any obvious cause. This is called **primary hypertension** or **essential hypertension**.
- Some people get nervous when they go to the doctor. They have high blood pressure in the doctor's office, but normal blood pressure at home. We call this **white-coat hypertension**.

Your doctor will help you find out what is causing your high blood pressure. He or she will ask you a lot of questions and do a physical exam. Your doctor may also want to do some blood tests or urine tests. He or she may ask for some pictures using ultrasound or x-rays. The doctor may ask you to start checking blood pressures at home. Some doctors also recommend an **ambulatory blood pressure study**. This uses a small machine that you wear on your arm for one day. It checks your blood pressure every few minutes all day and all night.

What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

Most people with high blood pressure do not have any symptoms. You may feel fine, but high blood pressure can damage many of your body's organs. This includes the heart, blood vessels, kidneys and eyes. High blood pressure can also cause headaches, nosebleeds, vision problems and even seizures.

What is the treatment for high blood pressure?

Eating less salt, getting more exercise and losing weight helps lower blood pressure. Some people also need medicine to help treat their blood pressure. There are many medicines. If you need one, your doctor will discuss the choices and which one he or she feels is best for you.

Your doctor will also want you to check your blood pressure at home, at school or at the doctor's office on a regular basis. Your doctor will tell you how often you should check your blood pressure. **It's important to keep checking your blood pressure and to write down the numbers.** This helps your doctor decide if your treatment is working.

Does it ever go away?

Some people find their blood pressure goes down after they lose weight and/or start exercising more. Other people have to continue taking medicine for a long time.

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