

# High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

High blood pressure (also called **hypertension**) is a serious illness that affects nearly 65 million adults in the United States. High blood pressure is often called a “silent killer” because many people have it but don’t know it. Over time, people who do not get treated for high blood pressure can get very sick or even die.

## What does high blood pressure do to your body?

High blood pressure can cause life-threatening illnesses like kidney problems, stroke, heart failure, blindness, and heart attacks.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone can have high blood pressure. Some people are more likely to have high blood pressure including:

- African Americans
- People over age 55
- People with a family history of high blood pressure

## Your chances of having high blood pressure are higher if you:

- Are overweight
- Eat foods high in salt
- Do not get regular exercise
- Smoke
- Drink alcohol heavily

## What are the signs of high blood pressure?

Many people with high blood pressure do not feel sick at first. The only way to know for sure is to get your blood pressure checked by a doctor or other health professional.

## Understanding your blood pressure: What do the numbers mean?

- When you have your blood pressure taken by your doctor, you are told two numbers, such as **120/80**. Both numbers are important.
- The first number is your pressure when your heart beats (**systolic pressure**). The second number is your pressure when your heart relaxes (**diastolic pressure**).
- Your blood pressure goes up and down during the day, depending on what you are doing. Brief rises in blood pressure are normal, but the higher your blood pressure stays, the more at risk you are.
- If your blood pressure is often greater than **140/90**, you may need treatment.
- If your blood pressure is greater than **120/80**, and you have other **risk factors, such as diabetes**, you may need treatment.



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## How is high blood pressure treated?

There are medicines people can take every day to control their high blood pressure. Only your doctor can tell if you need to take medicines.

## How does high blood pressure affect pregnant women?

A few women will get high blood pressure when they are pregnant. When pregnant women get high blood pressure, it is called preeclampsia or toxemia.

## How do I control my high blood pressure?

- Check your blood pressure.
- Take your high blood pressure medicine every day if needed.
- Exercise often.
- Eat foods low in salt.
- Lose weight or keep weight at a healthy level.
- Do not smoke.
- Limit alcohol.
- Talk to your doctor regularly about your pressure.

**FDA Office of Women's Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

### National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information Center

Phone: 301-592-8573

TTY/TDD: 240-629-3255

[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/pubs/pub\\_gen.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/pubs/pub_gen.htm)