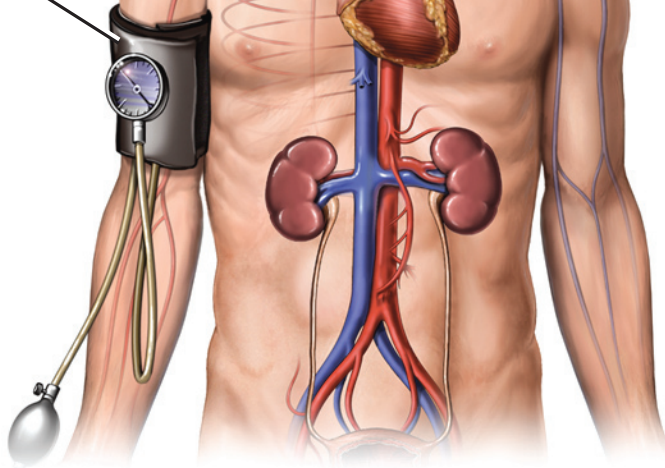


Your doctor has diagnosed High Blood Pressure (Essential Hypertension)

Blood pressure cuff



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Definition:

High blood pressure is abnormally high blood pressure with no known cause. Blood pressure measurements are read as two numbers. The higher number is called the systolic pressure. The lower number is called the diastolic pressure. Normal systolic pressure is 120 or less, and normal diastolic blood pressure is 80 or less.

High blood pressure is defined as systolic pressure greater than 140 and/or diastolic pressure greater than 90. People with systolic blood pressures between 120 and 139, or diastolic pressures of 80 to 89 are considered "pre-hypertensive" and need medical monitoring and lifestyle changes.

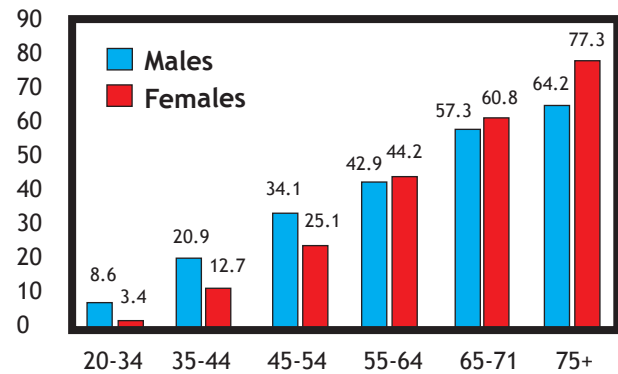
High blood pressure puts stress on the heart, lungs, brain, kidneys, and blood vessels. Over time, high blood pressure can damage these organs and tissues.

Causes

By definition, the cause of essential hypertension is not known.

Notes:

Estimated Percentage of Americans With High Blood Pressure by Age and Sex in U.S.



Source: American Heart Association

Risk Factors

A risk factor is something that increases your chance of getting a disease or condition. Risk factors for high blood pressure include:

- Age: Middle-aged and older
- Diabetes
- Emotional stress
- Heavy drinking of alcohol
- High-fat, high-salt diet
- Overweight
- Race: Black
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Sex:
 - Male
 - Post-menopausal female
- Smoking
- Use of oral contraceptives (birth control pills)



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High Blood Pressure

(Essential Hypertension)

Symptoms

High blood pressure usually does not cause symptoms. Your organs and tissues can be damaged by high blood pressure without you feeling any symptoms.

Occasionally, if blood pressure reaches extreme levels, you may experience the following symptoms:

- Abdominal pain
- Blurry or double vision
- Chest pain
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Shortness of breath

Diagnosis

High blood pressure is often diagnosed during a visit to the doctor. Blood pressure is measured using a cuff around the arm and a device called a sphygmomanometer. If your blood pressure reading is high, you'll be asked to come back for repeat blood pressure checks. If you have two or more visits with readings over 140/90, you will be diagnosed with high blood pressure.

Tests to make sure your high blood pressure is not caused by another medical condition and that it has not already caused complications include:

- Blood tests
- Chest x-rays
- Electrocardiogram (EKG)
- Urine tests

Treatment

Lifestyle Changes

- Begin a safe exercise program based on the advice of your doctor. In addition, try to add physical activity into your daily life.
- Eat a low-fat, low-sodium, high-fiber diet, rich in fruits and vegetables, as recommended by your doctor.
- If you smoke, quit.
- Lose weight if necessary.
- Your doctor can recommend a safe weight-loss plan and a reasonable target weight.

- Consider counseling, stress reduction exercises, and meditation to decrease the stress in your life.
- Drink alcohol in moderation. Moderate alcohol intake is no more than 2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women.

Medications

Types of medications to lower blood pressure include:

- Alpha blockers
- Alpha-beta blockers
- Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors (ACE inhibitors)
- Beta blockers
- Calcium channel blockers
- Diuretics
- Nervous system inhibitors
- Vasodilators

Note: Untreated high blood pressure can lead to:

- Heart attack
- Heart disease
- Kidney damage
- Stroke

Prevention

To reduce your chance of developing high blood pressure:

- Don't smoke. If you smoke, quit.
- Drink alcohol in moderation. Moderate alcohol intake is no more than 2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women.
- Eat a healthful diet, one that is low in saturated fat and rich in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.
- Exercise regularly.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

Last reviewed: July 2003 by Rhonda Kaufman, MD.

Sources:

- Conn's Current Therapy 2001, 53rd ed. W. B. Saunders Company; 2001.
- Chobanian AV, Bakris GL, Black HR, et al. The seventh report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure. The JNC 7 report. JAMA. 2003;289:2560 - 2572.
- American Heart Association
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



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