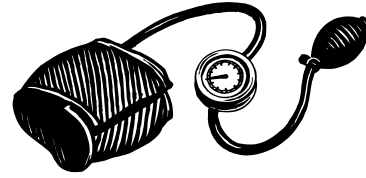


## *What Is Hypertension?*

Hypertension means “high blood pressure.” One of every five Americans has hypertension. If you have hypertension, it is important to control your blood pressure to prevent serious damage to your heart, eyes, brain and kidneys. Hypertension is the most common cause of stroke. A stroke can cause permanent brain damage.



## *What causes hypertension?*

Almost all people with hypertension have “essential” hypertension. This means no known cause can be found. However, there are risk factors that increase your chance of getting hypertension. These include:

- other family members with hypertension
- increasing age
- a high salt intake
- being overweight
- too much alcohol
- little or no exercise

## *How can I tell if I have hypertension?*

Hypertension is often called the “silent killer” because it often does not affect the way you feel. You should have your blood pressure taken regularly (at least yearly after age 40) to find out if you have hypertension. A single high blood pressure reading does not mean that you have hypertension. Because blood pressure normally changes throughout the day, you should have your blood pressure checked several times. Try to have your blood pressure taken when you are calm and relaxed.

## *What is blood pressure?*

Blood pressure is the force against blood vessel walls as the heart pumps blood through those vessels. Blood pressure changes with each beat of your heart. The amount of pressure during a heart beat is called the systolic pressure. The pressure between heart beats is called the diastolic pressure.

Normal systolic pressure is less than 130 millimeters of mercury. Normal diastolic pressure is less than 85 millimeters of mercury. This is written as two numbers with the systolic pressure on the top and the diastolic pressure on the bottom: 130/85.

Blood pressure may rise with exercise, strong emotions, cold temperatures, and even with eating a large meal. However, blood pressure should return to less than 130/85 and remain normal the rest of the day.

### ***What can I do to control high blood pressure?***

Healthy lifestyle changes are very important to help lower blood pressure. You should try to:

- eat healthy meals with a low amount of fat, sweets, and salt
- shed those extra pounds if you are overweight
- stop tobacco use and large amounts of alcohol
- begin regular exercise (talk with your doctor before you begin)

You may also need medicine to help control your high blood pressure. Your doctor will prescribe the best medicine for you. It is up to you to take your medicine at the right times. Ask your doctor to explain anything about the medicine that is not clear to you. Find out what to do if you forget to take a dose. “Catch up” or extra doses may be dangerous.

### **REMEMBER.**

Hypertension is a common disease which can damage your health. It is important for you to try to make healthy lifestyle changes and take medicines that your doctor prescribes. Controlling your blood pressure can help you live an active and healthy life. For more information about hypertension, talk with your family doctor.

#### **My Blood Pressure (BP) Record** **Goal: under 130/85**

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