



High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

High blood pressure (HBP) is often called the “silent killer” because it has no symptoms. In fact, many people have high blood pressure for years without knowing it. It affects more than 40 percent of adult non-Hispanic blacks. African Americans are more likely to have high blood pressure, develop it earlier in life, and at any decade in life, it’s more severe.

Blood pressure is the force of circulating blood against the walls of the blood vessels. It’s recorded as two numbers. The higher number, called systolic pressure, represents the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats. The lower number, diastolic pressure, is the pressure when the heart rests between beats. The only way to find out if you have hypertension is to have your blood pressure checked.

Blood pressure below 120/80 is considered normal for adults. High blood pressure is a systolic pressure of 140mm Hg or higher and/or a diastolic pressure of 90mm Hg or higher.

People with blood pressures between 120–139/80–89 mm Hg are identified as being at high risk for developing hypertension. This condition is called prehypertension and affects an estimated 50 million American men and women.

Causes of HBP

Close to 95 percent of reported high blood pressure cases in the United States do not have an underlying cause. However, hypertension has been linked to certain risk factors.

High blood pressure tends to be hereditary, but is greatly influenced by other factors as well. Age and race also play a role. In the United States, African Americans are twice as likely as whites to have high blood pressure. People 35 years or older are at higher risk of hypertension. Other risk factors include physical inactivity, obesity, smoking, excessive drinking, high consumption of salt, pregnant women and people with diabetes.

Effects of HBP

Untreated hypertension can lead to serious diseases, including stroke, heart disease, kidney failure and eye problems. It may also lead to heart failure, a common but disabling condition that can cause breathing problems.

Prevent or Reduce HBP

You can prevent or reduce high blood pressure by taking steps to live a healthier lifestyle. Here are some tips:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- Do not smoke.
- Eat a balance diet low in saturated fats, trans fats, salt and cholesterol.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.
- Reduce stress.
- Take medicines prescribed by your doctor.
- Be aware of your blood pressure level.

Treatment for HBP

Lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly and quitting smoking, can help lower blood pressure. If your blood pressure is still too high, your doctor may prescribe medication. It’s important to take your medicine just as you are told by your healthcare professional. If a problem develops, tell your doctor. Never stop taking your medicine without consulting with your doctor first.

For More Information

Talk to you doctor or other healthcare professionals about high blood pressure. Be aware of your risks for hypertension by finding out your family medical history and making regular visits to the doctor.

You can find more information about high blood pressure at www.powertoendstroke.org.

