



American
Heart
Association

American
Stroke
Association®

life is why™

High Blood Pressure



What is **blood pressure**?

When your heart beats, it pumps blood into your blood vessels. This creates pressure against the blood vessel walls. This **blood pressure** causes your blood to flow to all parts of your body.

When you're healthy, your arteries are elastic. They stretch when your heart pumps blood through them. How much they stretch depends on how much force the blood exerts.

Everybody has—and needs—blood pressure. It circulates blood through your body to your vital organs providing them the oxygen and food they need to work properly.

Your life is why™ it's important to know about blood pressure and how to keep it in the healthy range.



How is blood pressure measured?

Two numbers are recorded when measuring your blood pressure. The top, or larger, number (systolic pressure) measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The bottom, or smaller, number (diastolic pressure) measures the pressure while your heart rests between beats. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).



Blood Pressure Categories

Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg. A blood pressure of 120–139/80–89 mm Hg is called **prehypertension**. If you're an adult and your blood pressure is 140 mm Hg and/or 90 mm Hg or higher, you have **high blood pressure (HBP)**. If your blood pressure goes above this level and stays there, you are at risk of many health problems.

The only way to find out if you have HBP is to have your blood pressure measured. Your healthcare provider can check it for you. He or she may take several readings over time before deciding whether you have high blood pressure.

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic (mm Hg)		Diastolic (mm Hg)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Prehypertension	120–139	or	80–89
Hypertension, Stage 1	140–159	or	90–99
Hypertension, Stage 2	160 or higher	or	100 or higher

Source: Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure (JNC 7 Complete report) Hypertension 2003;42:1206.

What does **HBP** do to your body?

Having HBP can hurt your body in many ways. High blood pressure adds to the workload of your heart and arteries. Your heart must pump with more force, and the arteries must carry blood that's moving under greater pressure. If HBP continues for a long time, your heart and arteries may not function as well as they should.

High blood pressure increases your risk of stroke. It can also damage your kidneys and eyes. Compared with people with controlled HBP, people with uncontrolled HBP are also more likely to develop coronary heart disease and heart failure.



What can you do about HBP?

If you have high blood pressure, work with your healthcare provider to develop a plan to manage it. The effects of HBP can be prevented or reduced if it's treated early and kept under control.

Adopting a healthy lifestyle is vital for preventing or managing HBP. Healthy lifestyle changes include eating a healthier diet, limiting your sodium (salt) and alcohol intake, reaching and maintaining a healthy weight, and getting regular physical activity.

There are many medicines that can help reduce and control high blood pressure. Your healthcare provider may prescribe you medicine in addition to diet and lifestyle changes. You may need more than one type of medicine to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.

Things to **Keep in Mind**

High blood pressure is a lifelong condition. But, it can be managed. Once you start a treatment plan, maintaining a lower blood pressure will be easier.

It takes a team to treat your high blood pressure successfully. You and your healthcare provider need to work together. Follow these tips:

1. Keep all medical appointments.
2. Take your blood pressure drugs as directed. If you don't feel well after taking a medication, tell your healthcare provider. This will help him or her adjust your medicine.
3. Reduce the sodium (salt) in your diet. Aim for less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day.
4. Follow your healthcare provider's advice about diet and physical activity.
5. Try to lose weight if it's recommended.



For **More Information**

We want people to experience more of life's precious moments. It's why we've made better heart and brain health our mission.

Life is why™ we have created many educational booklets like this to help you and your family make healthier choices to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke, manage disease or care for a loved one.

You can also use Heart360® (**heart360.org**), a free online tool, to help you track and monitor blood pressure. You can track your progress and share it with your healthcare provider.

To learn more, call us toll-free at **1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721)** or contact your nearest American Heart Association office. You can also visit our Web site, **heart.org**.

For information on stroke, call **1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653)** or visit us online at **strokeassociation.org**.

Heart Attack Warning Signs

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Here are some of the signs that can mean a heart attack is happening.

- **Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath.** This may occur with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs.** These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain.

Stroke Warning Signs

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

F.A.S.T. is an easy way to remember how to recognize a stroke and what to do. Spot a stroke **FAST**. **F**ace drooping. **A**rm weakness. **S**peech difficulty. **T**ime to call 9-1-1.

Dial 9-1-1 Fast

Heart attack and stroke are life-or-death emergencies—every second counts. If you suspect you or someone you are with has any of the symptoms of heart attack or stroke, **immediately call 9-1-1 or your emergency response number** so an ambulance can be sent. **Don't delay—get help right away!**

For a stroke, also note the time when the first symptom(s) appeared. If given within 3 to 4.5 hours of the start of symptoms, a clot-busting drug may improve the chances of getting better faster.

Cut along dotted line and keep



For heart- or risk-related information,
call the American Heart Association at
1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721)
or visit us online at heart.org.

For stroke information, call our American Stroke
Association at **1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653)** or visit
strokeassociation.org. For information on life after stroke,
call and ask for the Stroke Family Support Network.

The statistics in this brochure were up to date at publication.
For the latest statistics, see the Heart Disease and
Stroke Statistics Update at heart.org/statistics.



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