High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

Blood pressure going higher and higher?

It could mean a bad moon’s rising.

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. When a person experiences high blood pressure (hypertension), the heart is forced to work harder than normal, causing it to grow abnormally large—straining arteries and the heart itself. High blood pressure can also lead to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and stroke.

A blood pressure reading consists of two numbers—systolic and diastolic. Let’s look at each of these measurements in more detail.

**Systolic**—The systolic measurement is the pressure of blood against artery walls when the heart pumps blood through the body. It is the first number in a blood pressure reading, and is considered normal when it is less than 120 mmHg (mmHg means “millimeters of mercury”—a measure your healthcare provider will use in relation to blood pressure).

**Diastolic**—The diastolic measurement is the pressure of blood against the artery walls when the heart relaxes and refills with blood. It is the second number in a blood pressure reading, and it is considered normal when it is less than 80 mmHg.

See the chart below for detailed breakdown of blood pressure levels.

---

**Signs & Symptoms To Look Out For**

**Symptoms**

High blood pressure is often called the “silent killer” because it has no symptoms. Sadly, it is estimated that of the 50 million Americans age six and over who have high blood pressure, one-third are unaware that they have the condition.

**Risk Factors**

Several risk factors—both controllable and uncontrollable—contribute to the likelihood of developing high blood pressure.

**Risk Factors You Can Control**

+ Being overweight or obese
+ Tobacco use
+ Eating too much salt
+ Consuming too much alcohol
+ Living a sedentary lifestyle

**Risk Factors You Cannot Control**

+ Race
+ Age
+ Family History

---

### Blood Pressure Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blood Pressure Classification</th>
<th>Systolic (mmHg)</th>
<th>Diastolic (mmHg)</th>
<th>Lifestyle Modification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>less than 120</td>
<td>and less than 80</td>
<td>Encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prehypertension</td>
<td>120-139</td>
<td>or 80-89</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 Hypertension</td>
<td>140-159</td>
<td>or 90-99</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 Hypertension</td>
<td>160 or higher</td>
<td>or 100 or higher</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: American Heart Association Recommended Blood Pressure Levels*
High Blood Pressure (continued)

Managing High Blood Pressure
In many cases, blood pressure can be managed simply by monitoring your lifestyle habits, or making a few changes. Some of the following changes are important factors in managing blood pressure.

+ **Reduce weight**—Losing weight reduces the strain on your heart and will cause blood pressure to drop as a result.

+ **Exercise**—Lack of regular physical activity (30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week) increases your risk for heart attack or stroke.

+ **Reduce alcohol intake**—Limit your alcohol consumption to no more than one or two drinks per day.

+ **Quit smoking**—Smoking is a major risk factor for almost every serious disease including high blood pressure.

+ **Alter your diet**—Eating a diet that's low in sodium may significantly reduce blood pressure.

A Self-Care Essential
Know Your Numbers. High blood pressure is often referred to as the “silent killer” because it has no symptoms. As with cholesterol and many other chronic conditions, it's important to get screened regularly. And, with the recent modification to blood pressure guidelines to include the category of “prehypertensive” it may be a good idea to get screened again soon. Many hospitals and community centers offer free screening services. Take advantage of these services and “know your numbers.”

Take Test