



High Blood Pressure

Fact:

Deaths from stroke and heart disease have declined dramatically.

Fiction:

It's a myth that you will know if you have high blood pressure.

Prevention:

You can prevent high blood pressure through healthy habits.

Treatment:

There is no cure, but there are many effective treatments, including a healthy lifestyle and medication.

High blood pressure (hypertension) has been called the silent killer.

About Blood Pressure

With high blood pressure, there may be no symptoms until the condition damages arteries, the heart, kidneys or eyes. It's important to regularly check blood pressure, because untreated high blood pressure leads to stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease, kidney failure, dementia, blindness and premature death.

The good news? Deaths from stroke and heart disease have declined dramatically. Although there is no cure, high blood pressure is both preventable and treatable.

Who Has High Blood Pressure?

One in four adult Americans* has high blood pressure. Until 55 to 60 years of age, it affects more men than women. Women then tend to catch up and gradually surpass men in their rates of this disease. A greater percentage of African-Americans than Whites or Hispanics develop high blood pressure, and African-Americans tend to develop more severe cases at younger ages.** A tendency to high blood pressure can run in families.

Uncontrollable factors in blood pressure include your race, age, family history and sex. See "prevention and treatment" below for controllable factors.

Symptoms of High Blood Pressure

Although the silent killer often causes no symptoms, sufferers may experience headaches, fatigue, dizziness and ringing in the ears.

When It's an Emergency

Seek emergency care for symptoms that include:

- Chest pain or severe pain in abdomen or back
- Vision problems, confusion, speech difficulties, seizure or weakness on one side
- Extremely high blood pressure
- Headache, leg swelling or seizure during pregnancy

Prevention and Treatment

Good health habits can prevent high blood pressure, and help treat it once it exists. Seek:

- A healthy weight. Some people are able to treat their high blood pressure with weight loss alone
- A diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy foods
- Regular aerobic exercise
- Normal cholesterol levels
- A balanced lifestyle and a positive frame of mind (stress and tension narrow arteries and make the heart beat stronger, for double impact on blood pressure)

Limit consumption of alcohol to one drink a day, and reduce the intake of salt, which causes the body to retain fluids and makes the heart work harder, ultimately injuring the kidneys and setting up a vicious cycle. Avoid added salt as well as salty condiments and processed foods. Rinse canned foods to remove a third of the salt, and check with your doctor before using salt substitutes.

Avoid smoking, because tobacco use accelerates the narrowing of blood vessels and greatly increases the chance of artery damage. The nicotine in a single cigarette can raise blood pressure to high levels and take nearly an hour to leave the system. Also avoid caffeine, especially before activities that may raise blood pressure. Many diet pills include caffeine. Be sure your doctor knows if you are using any of the following medications, which can affect blood pressure:

- Decongestants and comprehensive cold remedies
- Asthma medicines
- Antacids or buffered aspirin
- Anti-inflammatory drugs
- Body-building steroids

If your condition requires prescription medication as well as lifestyle changes, be patient. It may take your doctor several tries to find the drug or drugs that work for you.

* IntelliHealth
** Mayo Clinic

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