

## Know Your Risk Factors

### HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE



**Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls.** It's written as two numbers, such as 112/78 mm Hg. The top, systolic number is the pressure when the heart beats. The bottom, diastolic number is the pressure when the heart rests between beats.

Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg. If you're an adult and your systolic pressure is 120 to 139, or your diastolic pressure is 80 to 89 (or both), then you have "prehypertension" and your risk of heart attack and stroke starts to rise.

High blood pressure (HBP) is a pressure of 140 systolic or higher and/or 90 diastolic or higher that stays high over time. About 72 million Americans (and 1 in 3 adults) have it.

#### THE DANGER OF HBP

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms, but it raises the risk of stroke, heart attack, heart failure and kidney failure. It truly is a "silent killer."

No one knows exactly what causes most cases of high blood pressure. It usually can't be cured, but it can be controlled. Not treating high blood pressure is dangerous. You can live a healthier life if you treat and control it!

#### PEOPLE AT RISK

Some people are at higher risk of having high blood pressure. They include:

- **People with close blood relatives who have HBP**
- **African Americans**
- **People over age 35**
- **Overweight people**
- **People who aren't physically active**
- **People who use too much salt**
- **People who drink too much alcohol**
- **People with diabetes, gout or kidney disease**
- **Pregnant women**
- **Women who take birth control pills and who are overweight, had HBP during pregnancy, have a family history of HBP or have mild kidney disease**



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#### REDUCING HBP

Many people have high blood pressure without knowing it. Once you know about your condition, you can reduce your blood pressure and live a healthier life. It takes proper treatment and some changes in your lifestyle. But it's worth it!

Here are steps you can take now:

- **Lose weight if you're overweight.**
- **Eat a healthy diet low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and salt.**
- **Be physically active for at least 30 minutes** on most or all days of the week. Sign up for the Go Red BetterU, the American Heart Association's FREE 12-week online nutrition and fitness program that can make over your heart. The program offers practical ways to increase physical activity, make heart-healthy and tasty food choices, and reduce heart disease and stroke risks. For more information visit [GoRedForWomen.org/BetterU](http://GoRedForWomen.org/BetterU).
- **Limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day** if you're a woman. (Men can have up to two drinks a day.)
- **Take medicine** the way your doctor tells you.
- **Know what your blood pressure should be** and work to keep it at that level.


#### HBP AND MEDICINE

Your doctor may prescribe different types of medicine. Don't be discouraged if you need to take blood pressure medicine from now on. Sometimes you can take smaller doses after your blood pressure is under control, but you may always need some treatment. What's most important is that you take your medicine exactly the way your doctor tells you to. Never stop treatment on your own. If you have problems or side effects with your medicine, talk to your doctor.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional to learn more about high blood pressure. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk.

Learn your risk for heart attack and stroke by taking the Go Red Heart CheckUp at [GoRedForWomen.org](http://GoRedForWomen.org). To learn more facts about heart disease and how to reduce your risk, visit [GoRedForWomen.org/HeartHealthTools](http://GoRedForWomen.org/HeartHealthTools).



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