

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

Anyone can have high blood pressure. Some people are more prone to high blood pressure including African Americans, people over age 55 and people with a family history of high blood pressure. Your chances of having high blood pressure are higher if you are overweight, eat foods high in salt, do not exercise regularly, smoke and drink alcohol heavily. Certain chronic conditions also may increase your risk of high blood pressure including high cholesterol, diabetes, kidney disease and sleep apnea. Sometimes pregnancy contributes to high blood pressure.

Following are steps to take to control high blood pressure:

- Check your blood pressure
- Take high blood pressure medication every day if needed
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a low-salt diet
- Lose weight or keep your weight at a healthy level
- Do not smoke
- Limit alcohol

When your blood pressure is taken, you are told 2 numbers like 120/80. The first number is your pressure when your heart contracts (systolic pressure). The second number is your pressure when your heart relaxes (diastolic pressure). Blood pressure is determined by the amount of blood your heart pumps and the amount of resistance to blood flow in your arteries. The more resistant and the narrower your arteries are, the higher your blood pressure.

Blood pressure goes up and down during the day. Brief rises in blood pressure are normal, but the higher your blood pressure stays, the more at risk you are. If your blood pressure is often greater than 140/90, you may need treatment. Also, if your blood pressure is greater than 120/80, and you have other risk factors, such as diabetes, you may need treatment.

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