

## May is National High Blood Pressure Education Month

### HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, OR *HYPERTENSION*, IS CALLED "*THE SILENT KILLER*"

In most cases there are no clear warning signs, even as the condition damages your health. Find out more about the risk factors associated with high blood pressure.

#### What Is High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of arteries when the heart beats. Blood pressure rises and falls throughout the day. When the pressure stays elevated most of the time, then the condition is called *high blood pressure*.



The medical term for high blood pressure is *hypertension*. High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes the heart work too hard and contributes to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). It increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, the first- and third-leading causes of death among Americans. High blood pressure also can result in other conditions such as congestive heart failure, kidney disease and blindness.

High blood pressure affects about 50 million, - or one in four -, American adults. Some people are more likely to develop it than others. It is especially common among African-Americans, who tend to develop it earlier and more often than whites. Many Americans tend to develop high blood pressure as they get older, but hypertension is not part of normal healthy aging. About 60 percent of all Americans age 60 and older have high blood pressure. Others at high risk are the overweight, those with a family history of high blood pressure, and those with a high-normal blood pressure. High blood pressure also is more common in the southeastern United States.

#### Signs and Symptoms of High Blood Pressure

Most people with high blood pressure have **NO SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS**. Even so people often think that headaches, dizziness or nosebleeds are common warning signs of high blood pressure. It's true that a few people with early-stage high blood pressure have a dull ache in the back of the head when they wake in the morning. Or perhaps they have a few more nosebleeds than normal.

Headaches, dizziness or nosebleeds typically don't occur until high blood pressure has advanced to a higher stage — one that's possibly life-threatening. And some people with the highest blood pressure readings don't experience any of these symptoms.

Other conditions that can lead to uncontrolled high blood pressure cause the following symptoms:

- ✓ Excessive perspiration
- ✓ Muscle cramps
- ✓ Weakness
- ✓ Frequent urination
- ✓ Rapid or irregular heartbeat (palpitations)

***Check Your Blood Pressure Today!!!***

## Risk Factors for High Blood Pressure

There are four major risk factors for high blood pressure that you cannot control. They are:

- ✓ Age. Your risk of high blood pressure increases as you get older.
- ✓ Race. High blood pressure is more common in blacks than in whites.
- ✓ Gender. In young adulthood and early middle age, men have high blood pressure more often than women. For men and women ages 55 to 64, rates are about equal. At ages 65 and older, rates for women surpass those for men.
- ✓ Family history. High blood pressure tends to run in families.

The risk factors you can control or manage include:

- ✓ Obesity. The more body mass you have, the more blood you need to supply oxygen and nutrients to your tissues. The volume of blood circulated through your blood vessels increases, creating extra force on your artery walls.
- ✓ Inactivity. Lack of physical activity increases your risk of high blood pressure by increasing your risk of being overweight. Inactive people also tend to have higher heart rates. Their heart muscles have to work harder with each contraction, increasing the force on the arteries.
- ✓ Tobacco use. The chemicals in tobacco can damage the lining of your artery walls, causing the arteries to accumulate plaques (fatty deposits that contain cholesterol). Nicotine also constricts your blood vessels and forces your heart to work harder.
- ✓ Sodium sensitivity. People who are sodium sensitive retain sodium (salt) more easily, leading to fluid retention and increased blood pressure.
- ✓ Low potassium. Potassium is a mineral that helps balance sodium (salt) in your cells. If you don't consume or retain enough potassium, you can accumulate too much sodium.
- ✓ Excessive alcohol. Exactly how or why alcohol increases blood pressure isn't understood. But over time, heavy drinking can damage your heart muscle.
- ✓ Stress. High levels of stress can lead to a temporary but dramatic increase in blood pressure. Stress also can promote high blood pressure if you try to relax by eating more, using more nicotine or drinking more alcohol.

You also may be at increased risk for high blood pressure if you have a chronic illness. Examples include high cholesterol, diabetes, sleep apnea, and heart failure.

### When to Seek Medical Advice

Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years. Your doctor may ask to check your blood pressure more often. The National Institutes of Health recommends having your blood pressure checked more often than every 2 years if your blood pressure is above normal. The organization's recommendations for healthy adults ages 18 years and older are listed below.

Condition	Systolic (Top Number)	Diastolic (Bottom Number)	What to Do
Optimal	120 or less	80 or less	Recheck in 2 years
Normal	Less than 130	Less than 85	Recheck in 2 years
High-normal	130-139	85-89	Recheck in 1 year
Hypertension Stage 1	140-159	90-99	Confirm within 2 months
Stage 2	160-179	100-109	See doctor within 1 month
Stage 3	180 or higher	110 or higher	See doctor immediately or within 1 week