



Let's Talk About High Blood Pressure and Stroke

What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure means that the pressure in your arteries is consistently in the high range. It can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure.

Blood pressure results from the force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls. Two numbers represent blood pressure. The higher (systolic) number represents the pressure while the heart is beating and the lower (diastolic) number represents the pressure when the heart is resting between beats. The systolic number is always listed first and the diastolic number is second.

A blood pressure of less than 120 over 80 is considered normal for adults. A blood pressure reading equal to or higher than 140 over 90 is considered high. Blood pressure between 120-139/80-89 is considered "prehypertension" and requires lifestyle modifications to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.



Having hypertension does not mean that you are tense, nervous or hyperactive. You can be a calm and relaxed person and still have high blood pressure. You usually cannot tell if you have it! The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have it checked regularly by your doctor.

Who is at higher risk?

- People with a family history of high blood pressure
- African Americans
- People 35 years old or older
- People who are overweight or obese
- People who smoke are at higher risk for cardiovascular disease
- People who eat too much salt
- People who drink too much alcohol
- Women who use birth control pills
- People who aren't physically active
- Pregnant women

What should I do to control high blood pressure?

Even if you have had a prior stroke or heart attack, controlling high blood pressure can help prevent another one.

- Lose weight if you're overweight.
- Eat a healthy diet that's low in salt, saturated fat and cholesterol.
- Eat enough fruits and vegetables, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products.
- Enjoy regular physical activity.

- Limit alcohol to no more than two drinks a day if you're a man and one drink a day if you're a woman. Check with your doctor regarding alcohol consumption.
- Take medicine as prescribed.
- Know what your blood pressure should be and try to keep it at that level.






How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets available.
- For more information on stroke, or to receive additional fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at StrokeAssociation.org.
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American

Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653), and:

- ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers, trained to answer your questions and offer support
- ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area
- ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection Magazine*, a free publication for stroke survivors and caregivers

What are the Warning Signs of Stroke?

-  **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
-  **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
-  **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
-  **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
-  **Sudden, severe headaches with no known cause**



Learn to recognize a stroke. *Because time lost is brain lost.*

Today there are treatments that can reduce the risk of damage from the most common type of stroke, but only if you get help quickly – within 3 hours of your first symptoms.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you experience these warning signs!

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider:

Will I always have to take my medicine? _____

What should my blood pressure be? _____

How often should my blood pressure be checked? _____

The statistics in this kit were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at americanheart.org/statistics.

The American Stroke Association is a division of the American Heart Association. Your contributions will support research and educational programs that help reduce disability and death from stroke.

©1999-2003, American Heart Association.

American Stroke AssociationSM

A Division of American Heart Association 