

UNDERSTANDING & PREVENTING

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE



*Make an appointment with
your health care provider,
or call Sandhills Center:*

1-800-256-2452
(TTY: 1-866-518-6778)

WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard the blood pushes against the walls of your arteries. Arteries carry blood throughout the body. It is normal for blood pressure to go up and down throughout the day. But if it stays up, you have high blood pressure. Another name for high blood pressure is hypertension.

Blood pressure has two numbers. The first number is systolic pressure (top number). It shows how hard the blood pushes when your heart is pumping. The second number is the diastolic pressure (bottom number). It shows how hard the blood pushes between heartbeats, when your heart is relaxed and filled with blood. A normal blood pressure level is less than 120/80.

High blood pressure means that the top number stays high, or the bottom number stays high, or both. High blood pressure increases the risk of stroke, heart attack and other problems. Blood pressure is considered to be high if it is around 130/90, or higher. Your doctor will give you a goal for your blood pressure based on your health and age.

WHAT IS PREHYPERTENSION?

Stage 1 hypertension is also known as prehypertension. In prehypertension, your blood pressure reading may be elevated, or slightly above normal. You may have a systolic reading of 120-139, or the diastolic reading is 80-89. Prehypertension is a warning sign that you are at risk of getting high blood pressure in the future.



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Nearly half of all adults older than age 18 have prehypertension or hypertension, as measured by average of two or more readings at two or more doctor's visits. People with prehypertension have a greater risk for other health problems, such as obesity and diabetes. These are seen more in people with prehypertension than in those with normal blood pressure.

WHAT CAUSES HYPERTENSION?

Experts do not fully understand the exact cause of high blood pressure. But they know that some things are linked to it. These include aging, drinking too much alcohol, eating a lot of sodium (salt), being overweight, and not exercising.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

High blood pressure usually does not cause symptoms. Most people do not know they have it until they go to the doctor for other reasons. Very high blood pressure (such as 180/120) can cause severe headaches and vision problems.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

During a routine visit, your health care provider will measure your blood pressure. They may ask you to test it again when you are home. This is because your blood pressure can change throughout the day. To diagnose high blood pressure, your health care provider needs to know if your blood pressure is high throughout the day.

HOW IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE TREATED?

The two types of treatment are lifestyle changes and medications. Your doctor may ask you to lose extra weight, eat less sodium (salt), and be more active. If these lifestyle changes do not help enough, you also may need to take daily medicines.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT IT?

A heart-healthy lifestyle can help you prevent high blood pressure. These changes are even more important if you have risk factors for high blood pressure that you cannot change, such as race, age, and having others in your family who have high blood pressure.

Here are some things you can do:

- Stay at a healthy weight.
- Eat heart-healthy foods, and limit sodium.
- Get regular exercise.
- Limit alcohol to two drinks a day for men, and one drink a day for women.
- Manage stress.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120 – 129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130 – 139	or	80 – 89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

BLOOD PRESSURE READING CHART

(Source: The American Heart Association - heart.org)

Talk to your doctor about understanding your blood pressure levels. Seek medical help right away if your reading is at or near 180/120.