



TAKING CHARGE OF  
**Blood Pressure**



## **You can take charge of high blood pressure.**

High blood pressure is a common problem. If it's not treated, it can lead to illnesses like heart attack or stroke.

It's sometimes called "the silent killer" because it has no signs or symptoms. You may not even know you have it. That's why it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. If you have high blood pressure, there are things you can do to manage it.

# Understanding the facts about blood pressure.

## What is blood pressure?

Your heart pumps blood to the organs in your body. The blood travels to your organs through blood vessels called arteries. When your heart beats, it pushes blood through your arteries. Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries.

## Why is blood pressure important?

Your arteries are made to stretch as blood pumps through them. If your blood pressure is high, that means your heart is pumping with too much force. This force can damage your arteries by stretching them too much, like a hose that's carrying too much water. It can also cause tiny rips that leave scars in your arteries. Scars can catch cholesterol or plaque that move through your blood vessels. This can lead to blood clots or blockage of the arteries.

## Who is most at risk for high blood pressure?

Anyone can get high blood pressure, and as you get older, your chances get higher. If you are overweight or have diabetes, your chances are even higher. Family history can also play a role. High blood pressure can't be cured. But, it can be managed.

## Here are a few simple steps from blood pressure experts:



# Step 1

## Know your numbers.

A blood pressure reading includes a top and bottom number. The top (higher) number stands for the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The bottom (lower) number stands for the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests.



It's normal for your blood pressure to change throughout the day. It can be affected by exercise, stress or sleep. A single high blood pressure reading doesn't mean you have high blood pressure. Your doctor will keep track of your blood pressure readings over time. If your blood pressure stays high, your doctor may begin to treat you for high blood pressure.



**Normal blood pressure is 120/80.** The chart below shows blood pressure categories. **High blood pressure begins at 140/90.** Your doctor can tell you the range that is normal for you.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper #)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower #)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Prehypertension	120–139	or	80–89
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1	140–159	or	90–99
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2	160 or higher	or	100 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis (Emergency care needed)	Higher than 180	or	Higher than 110

\* Source: American Heart Association, [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)



# Step 2

## Know your numbers.

There are simple changes you can make to keep your blood pressure under control. You don't have to make all of these changes at once. Even small steps can help. Your doctor can also suggest programs that will help you stick with the changes.

## Lose weight if you are overweight.

- Ask your doctor about body mass index, and the range that's right for you. Body mass index (BMI) is a number calculated from your weight and your height.
- Balance your meals and watch your portion size.
- Get regular exercise.
- Aim for a weight loss of one or two pounds per week.



## Eat heart healthy.

- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables.
- Include whole grains in your diet, as well as lean meats, like chicken, pork and seafood. Use skim or 1% milk and low-fat dairy products.
- Stay away from foods that are high in solid fats. Use oils instead of butter or cream when you cook.



## Quit smoking.

Smoking causes:

- The nicotine in tobacco products increases blood pressure and heart rate. It can also damage arteries and blood vessels, increase blood clotting and decrease oxygen to the heart.
- Smoking increases your chances for stroke, heart disease and several types of cancers.



## Drink alcohol in moderation.

- No more than 2 drinks a day for men.
- No more than 1 drink a day for women.

## Be more active.

- Work up to at least 30 minutes of activity, 3–4 times per week.
- If you don't have 30 minutes, try to find two 15-minute periods, or even three 10-minute periods.



## Use less salt (sodium).

- Consume less than one teaspoon of salt per day (2,300 mg).
- Read labels on foods like soup, bread and frozen meals. Choose the foods that are lower in sodium.
- Use spices or herbs to season food while cooking, not the salt shaker.
- Limit fast food.

# Step 3

## Track your numbers and take your medicine.

You can check your blood pressure at home, at a store or at a clinic. Many pharmacies have blood pressure machines and will check your blood pressure for you. Try to check it often, and keep track of the results. Share them with your doctor at each visit.



Your doctor may also prescribe medicine that will help keep your blood pressure down. Take the medicine exactly as your doctor tells you. You should know how many times a day it should be taken, what time of day it should be taken, and whether it should be taken with food.

You should also be careful about over-the-counter medicines. Some can be harmful for people with high blood pressure. Be sure to read labels carefully.





# Step 4

## Know the risks.

Remember, high blood pressure can lead to serious illness if it's not treated.

### 1 Heart Attack.

- High blood pressure causes damaged and blocked arteries. A blocked artery can keep blood from reaching the heart. Blood carries oxygen to the heart, which it needs to survive. A heart attack happens when the blood supply to the heart is cut off.
  - **Warning signs:** Chest discomfort, discomfort in other parts of the upper body, shortness of breath, breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, lightheadedness
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### 2 Heart Failure.

- High blood pressure damages arteries. This can cause heart failure, which means the heart is working harder than it should to get blood to other organs.
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### 3 Strokes.

- Strokes happen when a blood vessel to the brain is blocked or bursts. High blood pressure damages blood vessels. This makes them more likely to burst or become blocked.
  - **Warning signs:** Face drooping, arm weakness, speech difficulty
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### 4 Kidney Failure.

- The kidneys are full of arteries, which are damaged by high blood pressure. The kidneys also help the body manage blood pressure. Kidneys damaged by high blood pressure can cause kidney failure.
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### 5 Hypertensive Crisis.

- If blood pressure becomes very high, it can lead to a hypertensive crisis. This is one of the only times that there are symptoms of high blood pressure. Get medical help right away if you think you're having a crisis.
- **Warning signs:** Extreme high blood pressure reading, severe headaches, severe anxiety, shortness of breath, nosebleeds

# Step 5



## **Have an action plan.**

Bring the guide on the right with you to your doctor and create a blood pressure action plan that is right for you.

## **Don't be discouraged if your blood pressure doesn't come down right away.**

It can take a few months to find the right treatment. You may have to try more than one medicine in order to find the best one for you. If you're having trouble making lifestyle changes, ask your doctor's team about programs and treatments that may help.

# My blood pressure action plan.

*(Take this form with you to your next doctor's visit and fill it out together.)*

**What is my blood pressure goal?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is my blood pressure today?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Should I take my blood pressure at home?** Y / N

**If yes, how often?**     Every A.M.         Every P.M.         \_\_\_\_ Times a week

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Ask your doctor to show you how to take your blood pressure correctly and how to record the numbers.)*

**My doctor says my blood pressure is too high if my numbers look like this:**

Systolic (top number)				
Diastolic (bottom number)				

**My doctor says my blood pressure is too low if my numbers look like this:**

Systolic (top number)				
Diastolic (bottom number)				

**When should I call my doctor?**

*(Take this form to your doctor and get reasons to call.)*

Follow this plan first: \_\_\_\_\_

If I have these symptoms, I should call my doctor:

Sick to my stomach     Headache     Blurry vision     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Steps to help prevent problems:**

Take my medications as ordered     Limit salt or sodium in my food     Stop smoking

Be physically active every day for: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ gave me these directions on \_\_\_\_\_

*(Doctor name)*

*(Date)*

## Find out more about high blood pressure.

### American Heart Association

Web: [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

Call: 1-800-AHA-USA-1

### National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

Web: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/hbp/>

Call: 1-301-592-8573

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web: <http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/>

Call: 1-800-CDC-INFO

To learn more about UnitedHealthcare Community Plan:



Call **1-800-318-8821, TTY 711**,  
Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET



Or visit **UHCommunityPlan.com**  
**myuhc.com/communityplan**



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