

What's the Hype With Hypertension?

Fifty million adult Americans, over one in four, have high blood pressure. However, almost 1/3 of them don't know they have it, and only 34% of those who do know that they have high blood pressure keep it under control. The likelihood of having hypertension increases with age, afflicting the majority of Americans older than fifty, although it's even been diagnosed in children.

So What Is So Important About High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure, often called "hypertension", is known as the silent killer because it often has no symptoms. It is the most potent risk factor for the development of cardiovascular disease and can lead to a heart attack, stroke or kidney failure. The good news is that it can be prevented and controlled.

A Quick Overview Of Hypertension:

The heart pumps blood which carries essential oxygen and nutrients throughout the body. The blood is transported in the arteries and veins. Blood pressure is the force of blood as it presses against the walls of the arteries, like the pressure of water in a garden hose. Blood pressure is measured by two numbers. The top number is the "systolic" reading, which is the pressure required for the heart to push blood through the arteries. The bottom number is the "diastolic" reading which is the pressure against the arterial walls when the heart is at rest.

So What Are The Recommended Numbers?

"Normal" blood pressure is defined by consistent "systolic" pressure readings of less than 120, and "diastolic" reading of less than 80. Hypertension is defined as having a systolic reading of 140 and above or a diastolic reading of 90 and above. Before hypertension can be diagnosed, three separate elevated readings need to occur. Recently the Joint National Committee on Hypertension added a new diagnostic category called "pre-hypertension" where systolic readings are between 120 and 139 and diastolic readings are between 80 and 90.

[\(www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/hypertension/\)](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/hypertension/)

What Causes Hypertension?

The exact causes are usually unknown. However, certain factors associated with hypertension include smoking, being overweight, having a diet high in salt, having excess stress, lacking physical activity or drinking alcohol excessively.

How Can I Find Out If I Have High Blood Pressure?

The only way to detect hypertension is by having your blood pressure checked regularly. The test is quick and is totally painless. A diagnosis of high blood

pressure can only be made after several readings have been taken on different days.

So What Can I Do If I Have Been Diagnosed With Hypertension?

Once a diagnosis has been made, your physician will discuss with you possible options. These could include lifestyle changes and possibly medication.

So How Do I Control It?

Often times a change in lifestyle is all that is needed to control mild to moderate hypertension. For example, losing 10 pounds can often lower your systolic blood pressure by 8 to 10 points. Dietary changes including eating less salt and eating more fruits and vegetables have been shown to be effective in lowering blood pressure. Aerobic exercise helps reduce blood pressure and improves heart performance, while decreasing the risk of heart attack. Always check with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.

If healthy eating and exercise alone are not sufficient, your doctor may prescribe medicine. Regular checkups with your physician are essential to determine the effectiveness of the medication.

High blood pressure is something you might be living with, so make sure your blood pressure is under control!

A healthy reminder from your friends at EBS/Atlanta