

# Understanding High Blood Pressure

## 1. What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard your blood pushes against the walls of your arteries. High blood pressure (also known as hypertension) is a disease in which a person has elevated blood pressure. If your blood pressure stays high over time, it damages your blood vessels, heart, brain, and kidneys. It can cause heart attacks, heart failure, kidney failure, strokes, dementia, and pain in your legs when walking and ulcers in your skin.

## 2. What are the signs and symptoms when high blood pressure has damaged your organs?

High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer” because you rarely feel any symptoms until it has already damaged your body. When blood pressure has damaged your organs, you may feel these symptoms:

- Blurry vision
- Headaches
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath

## 3. How do you prevent high blood pressure?

You can prevent high blood pressure through lifestyle changes. Remember to:

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, fish, whole grains, and reduced fat dairy products.
- Eat salt intake to less than ¾ teaspoons (1,500mg) per day.
- Exercise at least 40 minutes each day.
- Lose extra weight.
- Limit alcoholic drinks to one per day.
- Take medicines, if prescribed by your doctor.
- Avoid or stop smoking (call **1-800-NO-BUTTS** to get information on how to quit).
- Find ways to manage your stress.

## 4. How is high blood pressure treated?

The lifestyle changes listed above can help lower your blood pressure. Most doctors will recommend that you try making these lifestyle changes for about six months before starting medicines. However, the doctor may prescribe medicines right away if you have other chronic diseases or your blood pressure is very high compared to your goal blood pressure. Most people with high blood pressure have to take medicines to protect their heart, brain and kidneys. It’s very important to take prescribed blood medicines to control your blood pressure every day, even if you are feeling well.



### Risk Factors

The following may increase your chances of getting hypertension:

- Family history
- Age
- Smoking
- Overweight and obesity
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Race (African American, Native American, Latino)
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Eating too much salt/sodium
- Sleep apnea and kidney disease

### Blood Pressure Goals

**People with diabetes or kidney disease:** 140/90mm Hg

**Ages 18-60** (without diabetes or kidney disease): 140/90mm Hg

**Age greater than 60** (without diabetes or kidney disease): 150/90mm Hg