

District of Columbia Department of Health

What You Need to Know About High Blood Pressure

What is High Blood Pressure?

- High Blood Pressure is known as the “**Silent Killer**” because many people do not experience signs or symptoms right away.
- The force of blood pushing against the heart’s arteries as the heart pumps blood is known as “blood pressure.” There are two numbers used to show this pressure:

Systolic, which is the top number

Diastolic, which is the bottom number

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|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Normal | Systolic = less than 120 |
| | Diastolic = less than 80 |
| Prehypertension | Systolic = between 120 -139 |
| | Diastolic = between 80-89 |
| High Blood Pressure | Systolic = 140 -159 |
| | Diastolic = 90- 99 |

- About 1 in 3 adults in the United States has high blood pressure

Why is Blood Pressure Important?

- High Blood Pressure is a **VERY** dangerous condition and increases the risk for heart disease and stroke.
- Know your numbers and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Knowing your blood pressure reading can help control it.
- High blood pressure causes the heart to work too hard and can lead to heart failure, kidney disease and blindness.
- Seek Treatment. It can help prevent damage to other organs in the body.

What Can I Do to Prevent or Control High Blood Pressure?

- **Increase Physical Activity:** It is recommended to incorporate **at least 30** minutes of physical activity into your day. Take a walk, take the stairs, or get off the bus a few stops early.
- **Follow a Healthy Eating Pattern** that is low in fats, saturated fats, sodium, and alcohol. **Eat 4-5 serving** of fruits and vegetables per day along with fiber and protein.
- **Reduce Salt and Sodium** in your diet by reading labels and adding less salt in foods. It is recommended that adults have **less than 2,400** milligrams of sodium a day (approximately 1 tsp).
- **Maintain a Healthy Weight:** Everyone’s weight is different. Please contact your health care provider for guidance on what your healthy weight should be
- **Quit Smoking:** The “DC Quit Line” can help. Please call **1-800-QUIT NOW or 1-800-784-8669**

What Are Some Important Questions to Ask My Doctor?

- What is my blood pressure reading and what can I do to keep it at an appropriate level?
- What is a healthy weight for me?
- Do you have a recommended healthy eating plan that I can follow to help me lower my blood pressure?
- Should I take my blood pressure medicine at a certain time of the day?
- Is regular physically activity safe for me?
- Will I encounter side effects from my blood pressure medication?



For more information, contact the
DC Department of Health at:
202-442-5925

