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Healthy Insights

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Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (hypertension) is often called the “silent killer” because its side effects usually cannot be seen nor felt. Untreated high blood pressure can lead to serious health problems. High blood pressure is commonly seen in older adults because the body’s system of blood vessels (the vascular system) changes with age. Knowing how to prevent and treat high blood pressure is an important part of staying healthy.

How High is Too High?

Blood pressure is measured in two numbers, systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Systolic blood pressure is the top number on a blood pressure reading and represents the blood that is being pushed out of the heart. Diastolic blood pressure is the bottom number on a blood pressure reading and represents the blood that fills the heart when it is relaxed. High blood pressure is anything higher than 130/80 (130 systolic and 80 diastolic). Isolated systolic hypertension is when the blood pressure is 130 or higher systolic and less than 80 diastolic. This can lead to shortness of breath, lightheadedness, and falls. Additionally, if your blood pressure exceeds 180/120 accompanied by headache, chest pain, nausea/vomiting, or dizziness, you should immediately call 911. If you are experiencing high blood pressure without symptoms, you should call your doctor.

How Your Body is Affected

High blood pressure has a variety of effects on many systems in the body. High blood pressure could lead to:

- Heart attack/heart failure
- Stroke
- Kidney disease/kidney failure
- Vision loss
- Sexual dysfunction (erectile dysfunction in men and low sex drive in women)
- Chest pain (also called angina)
- Peripheral artery disease (blockage of blood from the heart to the legs)

If you notice any of these symptoms in your day-to-day life, talk to your doctor.

Medications Can Help

There are medications that can help control high blood pressure, but cannot cure it. If you are started on high blood pressure medication, you will most likely have to take it long term. However, changing daily habits can lower the dose of the medication that is being taken.

In some cases, lifestyle changes can be enough to eliminate the need for medication. Blood pressure medication should be taken at the same time every day, so try setting an alarm or taking your medication with a meal. Blood pressure medications come in different classes (diuretics, beta-blockers, vasodilators, etc.) and have different effects on the body. Speak to your physician or pharmacist about any side effects you may experience. Additionally, other supplements and medications can cause possibly dangerous interactions when taken with blood pressure medications. To prevent this from happening, tell your doctor all the medications you're currently taking.

Ways to Prevent and Treat High Blood Pressure

There are many ways to both treat and prevent high blood pressure from becoming worse without using medication. Here are just a few lifestyle changes that can help improve high blood pressure:

- 1. Maintain a healthy weight and quit smoking.** Be sure to consult a doctor before losing weight.
- 2. Follow the DASH eating plan (bit.ly/43mxo89).** This eating plan is made up of vegetables, fruits, grains, protein, dairy, and healthy oils. People using this eating plan should limit the amount of alcohol, salt, and saturated fat (cheese, bacon, butter, etc.) that they eat.
- 3. Sleep well and reduce stress.** Staying active is a great way to both improve sleep and reduce stress.



Sources

[High Blood Pressure and Older Adults](#)
(bit.ly/3IDA5u5)

[Health Threats from High Blood Pressure](#)
(bit.ly/3q9w6iq)

[Peripheral Arterial Disease](#)
(bit.ly/431IDmR)

[Types of Blood Pressure Medications](#)
(bit.ly/3owBADt)

[Medication Interactions: Food, Supplements and Other Drugs](#) (bit.ly/3OAlzG3)

IPRO Healthy Insights comes from Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO's Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, a nationally recognized public health advocate.

IPRO is a non-profit organization that works with government agencies, providers and patients to measure and improve healthcare for all. For over 35 years we've made creative use of clinical expertise, emerging technology and data solutions to make the healthcare system work better.



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