# MANAGING YOUR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION)

## What Is Hypertension?

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against artery walls from your heart pumping blood through your arteries. The increased blood pressure puts a strain on your circulatory system. Blood pressure is given as two numbers. The systolic pressure is the top number, and the diastolic pressure is the bottom number. Both are recorded as mm Hg (millimeters of mercury), which tells how high a column of mercury is raised by the pressure. The systolic pressure is the maximum pressure as the heart contracts, the diastolic pressure is the lowest pressure between contractions (heart at rest). Normal values are usually 120/80. The American Heart Association defines hypertension for adults as 140 mm Hg or higher systolic and/or 90 mm Hg or higher diastolic. These numbers should be used as a guide only.

## What Causes Blood Pressure to Increase?

Being overweight, excessive salt (sodium) intake, some medications, and lack of physical activity contribute to hypertension.

## What Are the Risk Factors for Hypertension?

More than half of all Americans age 65 and older have hypertension. People with obesity, diabetes, gout, or kidney disease; heavy drinkers of alcohol; and women taking birth control pills are at increased risk. African Americans (especially those living in southeastern United States) and people with parents or grandparents with hypertension have an increased risk.

## What Are the Symptoms of Hypertension?

People usually have no or only mild vague symptoms. Severe hypertension can produce headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, nausea, ringing in the ears, and confusion.

**How Is Hypertension Diagnosed?**

Blood pressure is measured using a blood pressure cuff and stethoscope or an automated meter. Hypertension is diagnosed if blood pressure is high during at least two office visits. The health care provider may check blood pressure in lying down and standing up positions, and in both arms if your blood pressure is very high.

**What Are the Complications of Hypertension?**

Untreated hypertension strains the heart and arteries and in time damages them. Hypertension is a key risk factor for heart failure, heart attack (myocardial infarction), stroke, and eye or kidney damage.

**How Is Hypertension Treated?**

Benefits of treatment for hypertension are well known. Deaths from heart disease and stroke are greatly reduced by treatment.

Many people can control hypertension by lifestyle changes, such as choosing foods that are low in salt, calories, and fat. Also, limiting serving sizes, maintaining a healthy weight, and increasing physical activity all help reduce blood pressure.

People must take medicine daily to control hypertension. These drugs usually include diuretics, beta-blockers, vasodilators, angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, calcium channel blockers, and alpha-blockers.

People with hypertension should have blood pressure checked routinely and be under a doctor's care.

**DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Hypertension**

✔ **DO** reduce daily sodium (salt) intake to 2400 milligrams (mg) or less.

✔ **DO** maintain a healthy diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products with

less saturated and total fats.

✔ **DO** maintain a normal body weight.

✔ **DO** regular aerobic physical activity such as brisk walking (at least 30 minutes per day,

most days of the week).

✔ **DO** take medicine as recommended.

✔ **DO** limit caffeine intake.

⊗ **DON'T** drink too much alcohol: for most men, no more than 2 drinks per day; for

women and lighter-weight people, no more than 1 drink per day.

⊗ **DON'T** smoke or use tobacco products.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Heart Association: Tel: (800) 242-8721; Website:

  http://www.americanheart.org

- American College of Cardiology: Tel: (800) 253-4636; Website: http://www.acc.org

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