



# TAKECHARGE

WELCOA'S SELF-CARE BULLETIN

## Keeping Your Blood Pressure

### IN CHECK

Optimal blood pressure is essential to your overall health. Normal blood flow delivers nutrients and oxygen to all parts of your body, including important organs like your heart, brain, and kidneys. Your beating heart helps to push blood through your vast network of blood vessels, both large and small. Your blood vessels, in turn, constantly adjust.

High blood pressure can make your heart work too hard and lose strength. The high force of blood flow can damage your blood vessels, making them weak, stiff, or narrower. Over time, high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, can harm several important organs, including your heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes.

Hypertension is a leading risk factor for death and disability worldwide. It also raises the risk of having a heart attack, heart failure, stroke, or kidney disease. Anyone, even children, can develop high blood pressure, but the risk increases with age. Excess weight or having a family history of high blood pressure also raises your risk for hypertension.

#### HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

High blood pressure may show little or no symptoms so it is important to have your blood pressure tested regularly. This easy, painless test involves placing an inflated cuff with a pressure gauge around your upper arm to squeeze the blood vessels. A health care provider may then use a stethoscope to listen to your pulse as air is released from the cuff, or an automatic device may measure the pressure.



Talk with your doctor if you have any concerns about your health.

Blood pressure is given in two numbers:

1. The first number represents the pressure in your blood vessels as the heart beats (called systolic pressure).
2. The second is the pressure as your heart relaxes and fills with blood (diastolic pressure).

Experts generally agree that the safest blood pressure—or “normal” blood pressure—is 120/80 or lower, meaning systolic blood pressure is 120 or less and diastolic pressure is 80 or less.

Hypertension is defined as having an average blood pressure of above 140/90. Since blood pressure can vary widely from day to day, a diagnosis of hypertension is usually based on an average of 2 or more readings taken on 2 or more occasions. If your blood pressure falls

between “normal” and “hypertension,” it’s sometimes called prehypertension. People with prehypertension are more likely to end up with high blood pressure if they don’t take steps to prevent it.

Fortunately, high blood pressure can be treated and prevented through diet, weight loss, and physical activity, as well as medical interventions. If you’re diagnosed with high blood pressure, your doctor will prescribe a treatment plan. You’ll likely be advised to make healthy lifestyle changes.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY BLOOD PRESSURE

- » Maintain a healthy weight. Work with your physician to determine what that is for you.
- » Stay active. Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.
- » Eat nutritious, whole foods. Choose an eating plan rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and low in both saturated fat and added sugars.
- » Reduce the amount of heavily processed foods you eat. These are foods that have unhealthy ingredients, such as salt, sugar, artificial colors, flavorings, and preservatives added to make them more appealing or make them last longer.
- » Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all. Men should have no more than 2 drinks per day; women no more than 1 drink per day.
- » Don’t use tobacco. Tobacco raises your risk for heart disease, stroke, and other health problems.
- » Work with your doctor to create the best plan for you. This may include medications to help lower your blood pressure in addition to lifestyle changes.

