

# High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

Blood pressure is the force put on the walls of the blood vessels with each heartbeat. Blood pressure helps move blood through your body.

## Taking Your Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is often checked by putting a wide band called a cuff around your upper arm. Air is pumped into the cuff. Your blood pressure is measured as the air is let out of the cuff.

Blood pressure is one number over a second number. You may hear your doctor say 110 over 72 (110/72), for example.

- The top number is higher and is called the systolic reading. It is the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart pumps.
- The bottom number is lower and is called the diastolic reading. It is the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart rests between beats.

## Normal Blood Pressure

Normal blood pressure is a top number less than 120 (systolic) and a bottom number less than 80 (diastolic). Each person's blood pressure changes from hour to hour and from day to day.

## High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is also called hypertension. High blood pressure is 130 or higher over 80 or higher. There are different stages of high blood pressure, based on how high your numbers are.

A diagnosis of high blood pressure is not made until your blood pressure is checked several times and it stays high.

The harder it is for blood to flow through your blood vessels, the higher your blood pressure numbers. With high blood pressure, your heart is working harder than normal. High blood pressure can lead to heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, and hardening of the blood vessels.

## Signs of High Blood Pressure

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it checked. Most people do not have any signs. Some people may have a headache or blurred vision.

## Your Care

Blood pressure control is very important. If you have high blood pressure you should:

- Check your blood pressure often. Call your doctor if your blood pressure stays high.
- See your doctor as scheduled.
- Take your blood pressure medicine as ordered by your doctor.

- Take your medicine even if you feel well or your blood pressure is normal.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Limit salt in your food and drinks.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Stop smoking or tobacco use.
- Exercise most every day.
- Reduce stress.
- Practice relaxation daily.

### **Call 911 right away if you have:**

- A severe headache
- Vision changes
- Chest pain, pressure, or tightness
- Have a hard time breathing or get short of breath
- Sudden numbness, tingling or weakness in the face, arm, or leg
- Sudden confusion, trouble understanding, or trouble speaking
- Trouble swallowing