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# You're in control

## You can do a lot to prevent high blood pressure

About one in three adults in the U.S. has high blood pressure or hypertension. Another one in three has prehypertension — blood pressure that is higher than normal, but not yet in the high blood pressure range.[1] Find out how high blood pressure can affect you and what you can do to control your blood pressure.

### Know your risk for high blood pressure

Anyone can get high blood pressure. Most of the time, though, it's found in people who are older than 35. You're also more likely to have high blood pressure if you are:[2].

- African American.
- Pregnant, postmenopausal or taking birth control pills.
- Diabetic.
- Overweight or obese.
- A heavy drinker.
- A tobacco user.
- Eating a diet high in salt or sodium and low in potassium.[3]

High blood pressure can damage your body even if it doesn't cause any symptoms.[4] That's why it is so important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. Talk to your doctor about your risk factors, and whether your blood pressure is healthy.

### Helpful resources

Visit the American Heart Association at heart.org and select Conditions/High Blood Pressure for information and tools, including a high blood pressure risk calculator.

## How high blood pressure affects your body

Your blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps it through your body.[4] Over time, if the force is too great, your arteries can harden. Less blood and oxygen passes through hardened arteries. Eventually your heart, brain and other organs can be damaged by the effects of high blood pressure.[5]

Normal blood pressure is below 120/80. This is read as "120 over 80." The first number is the "systolic" and the second number is the "diastolic." Even if only one of the numbers is higher than it should be, you could have prehypertension or high blood pressure.[5]

## What you can do to control your blood pressure

Because high blood pressure is so common, all of us should pay attention to our blood pressure numbers and try to keep them low. Here's how:[6]

- Have your blood pressure checked regularly, and know what's normal for you.
- Get to or stay at a healthy weight.
- Exercise at least 150 minutes each week.
- Be careful not to eat too much salt — ask your doctor how much sodium is safe for you.[7]
- Don't use tobacco products.
- Avoid saturated fat.
- Limit alcohol.

If you're diagnosed with high blood pressure, you may have to take medication. Be sure to follow your doctor's instructions. Ask your doctor before taking any over-the-counter medications or supplements.[8] Also, pay close attention to the ingredients in any over-the-counter cough, cold or flu medicine you take. Decongestants can raise your blood pressure or interfere with blood pressure medications and can be very dangerous for a person with high blood pressure.

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Sources
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