

Hypertension

Hypertension or High Blood Pressure affects about 65 million Americans or nearly 1 in 3 adults. When the heart beats, it pumps blood to the arteries and creates pressure in them. Blood pressure is determined by the amount of blood pumped by the heart, and the size and condition of the arteries. A person's blood pressure will usually fluctuate during the day, but when it remains elevated over a period of time it is called hypertension. Over time, high blood pressure can cause damage to the blood vessels and cause a decrease of blood flow to organs throughout the body. Some complications of high blood pressure include: stroke, heart disease, kidney disease and blindness.

Risk Factors:

Although the cause is usually unknown, certain factors seem to increase the occurrence of hypertension. They are heavy alcohol consumption, smoking, inactive lifestyle, being overweight, ethnicity, or having a family history of the disease.

Diagnosis:

Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80. Hypertension is diagnosed when:

- [Systolic blood pressure](#) is consistently over 140 (systolic is the "top" number of your blood pressure measurement, which represents the pressure generated when the heart beats)
- [Diastolic blood pressure](#) is consistently over 90 (diastolic is the "bottom" number of your blood pressure measurement, which represents the pressure in the vessels when the heart is at rest)

Symptoms:

High blood pressure often has no signs or symptoms. The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to be tested for it. Using the familiar blood pressure cuff, your doctor or nurse can easily tell if your blood pressure is high.

Treatment:

Adopting healthy lifestyle habits is an effective first step in both preventing and controlling high blood pressure. If lifestyle changes alone are not effective in keeping your pressure controlled, it may be necessary to add blood pressure medications. For an overview of blood pressure medications please see the American Heart Association website at <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2141>

References:

1. American Heart Association .Taking Medication for High Blood Pressure. November 28, 2006. <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2141>; accessed November 28, 2006.
2. Patient Education Center .High Blood Pressure. Last updated March 23, 2006. www.patienteducationcenter.org ; accessed September 25, 2006.

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