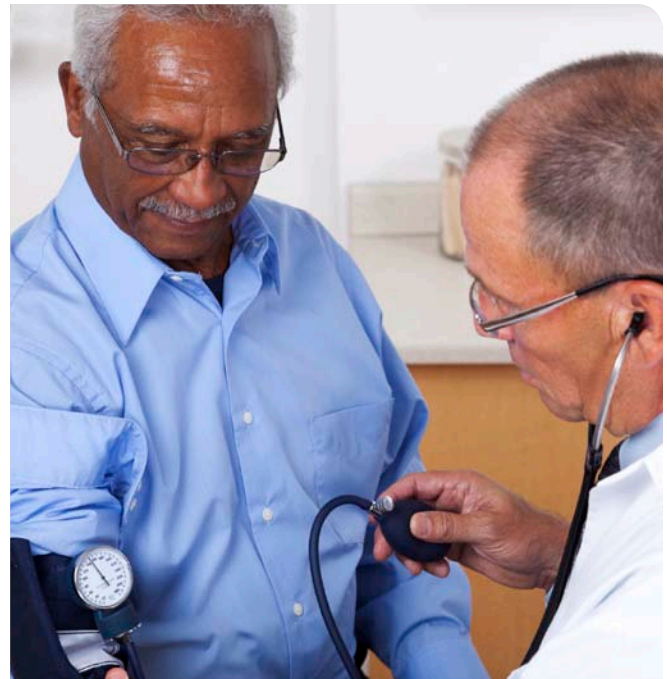




What About African Americans and High Blood Pressure?

The prevalence of high blood pressure in African Americans is among the highest in the world. It also develops earlier in life in blacks than in whites and is usually more severe. High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. That's why it's called the "silent killer." The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have your doctor check it regularly.



What's blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood against the walls of the arteries. Blood pressure results from two forces. One is created by the heart as it pumps blood into the arteries and through the circulatory system. The other is the force on the arteries as the heart rests between beats.

What should my blood pressure be?

Normal blood pressure is below 120/80mm Hg. The top number (systolic) is the pressure when the heart beats. The bottom number (diastolic) is the pressure when the heart rests between beats. If you're an adult with a blood pressure of 120 to 139/80 to 89 mm Hg, you have pre-hypertension. If your blood pressure is 140/90 mm Hg or higher, you have high blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure and diabetes or chronic kidney disease, your doctor will want your blood pressure to be less than 130/80 mm Hg.

What causes high blood pressure?

No one knows for sure. In fact, most high blood pressure cases have no known cause. Factors that may lead to high blood pressure include kidney disease, tumors of the adrenal glands near the kidneys and narrowing of certain arteries.

How often should I have my blood pressure checked?

Your doctor may take several readings over time before making a judgment about your blood pressure. Checking your blood pressure is quick and painless. You can have it done in a doctor's office, hospital, clinic, nurse's office, pharmacy, company clinic or health fair. Your doctor will tell you how often you should have it checked.

How does high blood pressure affect me?

It can damage blood vessels in various parts of your body. And the longer it's left untreated, the more likely organs such as your heart, brain, kidneys or eyes will be damaged. This can lead to heart attack, stroke, heart failure, kidney disease, erectile dysfunction, and loss of vision.

(continued)



Can high blood pressure be cured?

No. But it can be managed. You **can't** control these risk factors:

- **Race** — Blacks develop high blood pressure earlier in life and their average blood pressures are higher than the blood pressures of whites.
- **Heredity** — A tendency to have high blood pressure runs in families.
- **Age** — In general, the older you get, the greater your chance of developing high blood pressure.
- **Sex** — Men tend to develop high blood pressure earlier in life than women.

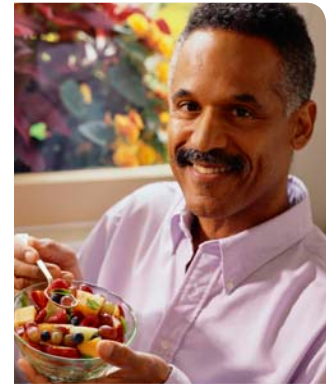
But you **can** manage some risk factors:

- Being overweight or obese
- Eating an unhealthy diet and too much salt
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Lack of physical activity
- Smoking

What can I do about my blood pressure?

You can:

- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat healthy foods low in saturated and *trans* fats, sodium (salt) and added sugars.
- Eat a diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, poultry, fish and nuts, and low-fat dairy products, while limiting red meat and sugary foods and beverages.
- Increase your daily physical activity.
- Limit alcohol to no more than one drink a day if you're a woman or two drinks a day if you're a man.
- If you smoke, stop. If you don't smoke, don't start. Avoid exposure to second-hand smoke.
- Take your medicine the way your doctor tells you.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

- How is high blood pressure treated?**
- What type of diet would be most helpful?**

My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.