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ANSWERS
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Cardiovascular Conditions

What About High Blood Pressure Among Black Adults?

The rate of high blood pressure among Black adults in the United States is one of the highest in the world. About 58% of Black adults in the U.S. have high blood pressure. It is often more severe in Black adults than in other racial or ethnic groups and it can develop earlier in life.

Historical and systemic factors play a major role in these numbers. These factors include adverse social drivers of health, the conditions in which a person is born and lives. The factors include lack of access to health care and healthy foods and other issues. There is also a lower rate of taking blood pressure medications among Black adults, partly due to lack of access to those medications and a distrust of health care.



The good news is high blood pressure can be managed. Commit to start making better choices today.

What should my blood pressure be?

Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg. The upper number is the systolic pressure. It's the pressure in your arteries when the heart beats. The lower number is diastolic pressure. This is the pressure when the heart rests between beats. If you're an adult with a systolic blood pressure of 120 to 129, and your diastolic pressure is less than 80, you have elevated blood pressure. High blood pressure is a systolic pressure of 130 or higher or a diastolic pressure of 80 or higher that stays high over time.

How often should I check my blood pressure?

For proper diagnosis of high blood pressure, your health care professional will use an average based on two or more readings obtained on two or more days.

You can have your blood pressure checked at a doctor's office, hospital, clinic, nurse's office, pharmacy, company clinic or health fair. You can also buy a home blood pressure monitor so you can check it at home. Your health care professional will tell you how often you should have it checked.

How can high blood pressure affect me?

Left uncontrolled or undetected, high blood pressure can damage blood vessels in various parts of your body. 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.

What can I do about my blood pressure?

Making healthy lifestyle changes is the first step.

- Don't smoke. Avoid secondhand smoke.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products, with lowered content of saturated and total fat.
- Eat less red meat and more fish and poultry. Avoid fried foods.
- Try to consume less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day of sodium (salt), moving toward an ideal limit of 1,500 mg per day.

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- Eat high-potassium foods, such as bananas, beet greens, lima beans and sweet potatoes. Aim for 3,500 – 5,000 mg of dietary potassium per day unless you have kidney problems or take certain medications. Check with your health care professional first.
- Avoid or limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day for women or two drinks a day for men.
- Be more physically active. Aim to include both aerobic and resistance exercise each week to help lower and control blood pressure. Types of activities include walking, jogging and weight lifting.

What about medications?

You may need one or more types of medication in addition to lifestyle changes to reach your blood pressure goal. You may need a trial period before your health care professional finds the best one, or combination of medications, for you.

If you are prescribed medication, always take it as prescribed. Don't stop taking it unless your health care professional tells you to.



Where can I find support?

You need access to social support and affordable, quality medical care and medications to help manage blood pressure.

If you have concerns about accessing care, affording your medications or finding transportation to and from medical appointments, ask your health care team or a trusted community leader for support. They may know of local resources to assist 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 for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news 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 your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How is high blood pressure treated?

What type of diet will help?

MY QUESTIONS:

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