

What You Should Know

High Blood Pressure

Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure. Blood pressure is the measure of the force of blood flowing against artery walls. Hypertension affects one in four adults.

A blood pressure reading involves two numbers. The first, the systolic, measures the pressure on your arteries when your heart beats and pushes blood through your circulatory system. The second, the diastolic, measures the pressure on your arteries between beats when your heart is resting.

High blood pressure is indicated by a consistent reading of 140/90 or higher. It can be based on a high reading in either the systolic or diastolic numbers. However, older people need to pay special attention to their systolic reading. One type of high blood pressure, called “isolated systolic high blood pressure” or ISH, affects many older people. This condition occurs when the systolic pressure is high, while the diastolic remains normal (in fact, diastolic pressure generally declines after age 55). ISH is just as dangerous as any other type of hypertension and can lead to stroke, heart attack, congestive heart failure, and other conditions.

Get Proper Treatment

There are simple ways to bring down your high blood pressure and keep it there. Today, a reading between 120/80 and 139/89 is considered “prehypertension.” If you have prehypertension, your doctor will recommend lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of developing true high blood pressure. This is a relatively new concept, so if your doctor told you in the past that treating your mild high blood pressure was unnecessary, ask again.

Risk Factors for High Blood Pressure

- ✓ smoking
- ✓ lack of exercise
- ✓ excess weight
- ✓ diabetes
- ✓ a high-cholesterol diet
- ✓ alcohol consumption
- ✓ a stress-prone personality
- ✓ heredity
- ✓ African-American ethnicity
- ✓ high sodium intake

Take Your Medication

High blood pressure can be lowered with medication, but it will rise again if you stop taking your prescription. Take your medication at the same time every day. Make it a part of your regular routine. If you miss a day, don't double up on a dose. Call your doctor for advice.

Tips to Help You Manage Your High Blood Pressure

- Reduce your intake of saturated fat and sodium.
- Limit your intake of caffeine.
- Eat a well-balanced diet that includes fish, chicken, whole grains and fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Limit your alcohol consumption.
- Watch your weight. If you're overweight, lose weight now.
- Get regular aerobic exercise at least three times a week. Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- Reduce stress by using relaxation techniques.
- If you smoke, quit.