

High Blood Pressure Questions and Answers

Q: What is high blood pressure?

A: Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of the blood vessels. Blood pressure goes up and down during the day. What you are doing and how you are feeling affects it. High blood pressure is when the blood pressure stays high over time. High blood pressure is also called hypertension.

Q: Is high blood pressure serious?

A: Yes, it is. It often has no symptoms, yet it can raise your chance of having heart disease and stroke. *High blood pressure often cannot be cured, but it can and should be controlled.*

Q: Why should I control my high blood pressure if I feel fine?

A: When blood pressure stays high over time, it harms the body. High blood pressure causes the heart to work harder. It can also cause blood vessels in the body to narrow in some places. This lessens blood flow to the heart, brain, kidneys and legs. This can cause:

- Heart disease
- Heart attack
- Stroke (brain attack)
- Kidney damage
- Vision problems and blindness

Q: What causes high blood pressure?

A: There are many causes of high blood pressure. Most of the time, the exact cause is not known. Some common causes are:

- Heart beating faster or harder than it should
- Greater than normal amount of blood
- Narrowing of the arteries



Q: Who is likely to have high blood pressure?

A: Some people and groups are affected differently:

- African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics tend to get it at a younger age and more often than Caucasians.
- As people age, they tend to get high blood pressure.
- These conditions and behaviors increase chances of getting high blood pressure:
 - ❖ Cigarette smoking
 - ❖ High cholesterol
 - ❖ Diabetes
 - ❖ Weighing too much
 - ❖ Not being active
 - ❖ Family history of high blood pressure
- Control some or all of these, to lessen your chance of having high blood pressure.

Q: How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

A: The only way to know you have high blood pressure is to be tested for it. The doctor or nurse performs a quick, easy and painless test.

Q: How is blood pressure tested and measured?

A: Your health care provider will:

- Wrap a cuff around your upper arm.
- Pump up the cuff with air.
- Let the air out slowly.
- Listen to the blood flow with a stethoscope.
- Write down the readings.

Blood pressure is recorded as 2 numbers. For example, the doctor or nurse might say “120 over 80.” It would be written as 120/80.

- The top number is the pressure when your heart pumps blood. It is called systolic pressure.
- The bottom number is the pressure when the heart relaxes between beats. It is called diastolic pressure.

For adults, normal blood pressure is under 120/80. Your blood pressure is high if:

- The top number is 120 or more.
- The bottom number is 80 or more.

Normal Blood Pressure Recommendation

Blood Pressure Categories

(Adults 18-years or older)	Top Reading, called SYSTOLIC (mmHg)	Bottom Reading, called DIASTOLIC (mmHg)
Normal	under 120	and under 80
Elevated	120-129	and under 80
Stage 1	130-139	or 80-89
Stage 2	140 or over	or 90 and over

mmHg = Millimeters of Mercury