



Taking charge of
your blood pressure.

You can take charge of high blood pressure.

High blood pressure is a common problem. If it's not treated, it can lead to illnesses like heart attack or stroke.

It's sometimes called "the silent killer" because it has no signs or symptoms. You may not even know you have it. That's why it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. If you have high blood pressure, there are things you can do to manage it.

Understanding the facts about blood pressure.

What is blood pressure?

Your heart pumps blood to the organs in your body. The blood travels to your organs through blood vessels called arteries. When your heart beats, it pushes blood through your arteries. Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries.



Why is blood pressure important?

Your arteries stretch as blood pumps through them. If your blood pressure is high, your arteries start to stiffen. This makes your heart work harder. This force can cause damage by stretching your blood vessels. It can also cause tiny rips that leave scars in your arteries. Scars can catch cholesterol or fat that move through your blood vessels. This can lead to blood clots or blocked arteries.

Who is most at risk for high blood pressure?

Anyone can get high blood pressure. And as you get older, your chances get higher. Your chances get even higher if you're overweight or have diabetes. Family history can also play a role. High blood pressure can't be cured. But, it can be managed.

5 simple steps to help you take charge:



1



Know your risks.

High blood pressure can lead to severe illness if it's not treated. Here are a few examples.



Heart attack.

Blood carries oxygen to the heart. The heart needs blood to survive. A heart attack happens when blood can't reach the heart. This might occur because of a blood clot or blocked blood vessel.

Warning signs:

Chest discomfort, discomfort in other parts of the upper body, shortness of breath, breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea and lightheadedness.

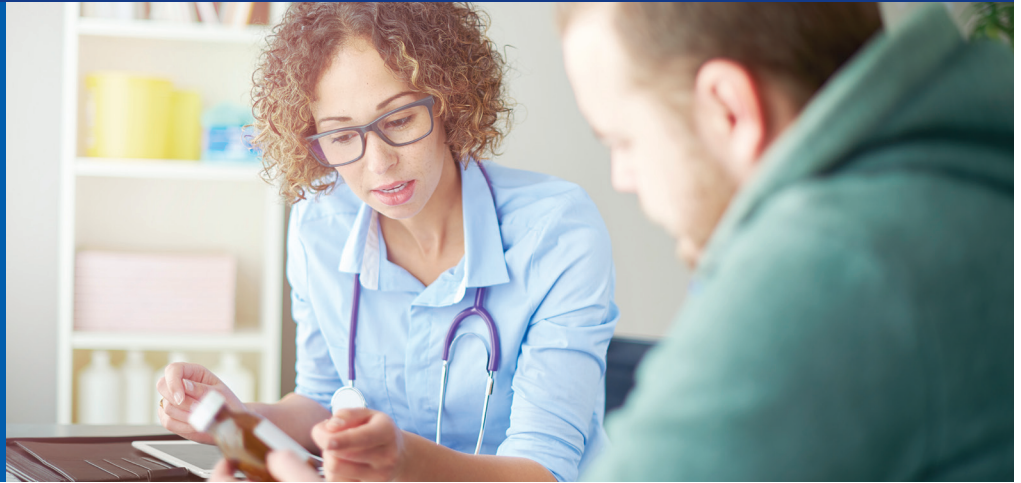


Heart failure.

Over time, high blood pressure can cause your heart to fail. This means your heart is working harder than it should to get blood to other organs.

Warning signs:

Shortness of breath, coughing or wheezing, feeling tired or lightheaded and high heart rate.



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Strokes.

Strokes happen when a blood vessel to the brain is blocked or bursts. High blood pressure damages blood vessels. This makes them more likely to burst or become blocked.

Warning signs:

Face drooping, arm weakness and speech difficulty.

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Kidney failure.

The kidneys are full of blood vessels that can be harmed by high blood pressure. Over time, the harm to blood vessels can cause the kidneys to stop working.

Warning signs:

Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, feeling tired or weak, changes in urination.

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Hypertensive crisis.

If blood pressure gets very high, it can be an emergency. This is when your top number is 180 or higher and your bottom number is 110 or higher. Get medical help right away if this happens.

Warning signs:

Extremely high blood pressure reading, severe headaches, severe anxiety, shortness of breath and nosebleeds.

2



Know your numbers.

Your blood pressure reading includes 2 numbers. The top number (systolic) measures the pressure when your heart beats. It's the higher of the 2 numbers. The bottom number (diastolic) measures the pressure when your heart rests. It's the lower of the 2 numbers.

120 ← **Systolic**

80 ← **Diastolic**

It's normal for your blood pressure to change during the day. It can change because of exercise, stress, sleep or pain.

A single high blood pressure reading doesn't mean you have high blood pressure. Keep track of your blood pressure readings over time. If your blood pressure stays high, your doctor may begin to treat you for high blood pressure.



Normal blood pressure is 120/80. The chart below shows blood pressure types. (Blood pressure is also called hypertension.) High blood pressure begins at 140/90. Your doctor can tell you what type of blood pressure you have.

Blood Pressure Types

Blood Pressure	Top Number	Bottom Number
Normal	Under 120	Under 80
Starting to Get High (Prehypertension)	120–129	Under 80
High Stage 1 (Hypertension)	130–139	80–89
High Stage 2 (Hypertension)	Above 140	Above 90
Very High (Hypertensive Crisis)	Above 180	Above 120

* Source: American Heart Association, heart.org

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Track your numbers.

You can check your blood pressure at home, at a store or at a clinic. Many pharmacies have blood pressure machines and will check your blood pressure for you. Try to check it often, and keep track of the results. Share them with your doctor at each visit.

Take your medicine.

Your doctor may also order medicine that will help keep your blood pressure down. You should know how many times a day it should be taken, what time of day it should be taken, and whether it should be taken with food.



Be careful with over-the-counter medicines. Some can be harmful for people with high blood pressure. Read the label to make sure it's safe for you.





Taking charge of your blood pressure.

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Make healthy choices.

There are things you can do to lower your blood pressure. You don't have to make all of these changes at once. Even small steps can help. Your doctor can also suggest programs that can help you stick with the changes.



Lose weight if you are overweight.

- Ask your doctor about body mass index (BMI), and the range that's right for you. BMI is a number calculated from your weight and your height.
- Eat smaller meals.
- Exercise often.
- Try to lose 1 or 2 pounds per week.



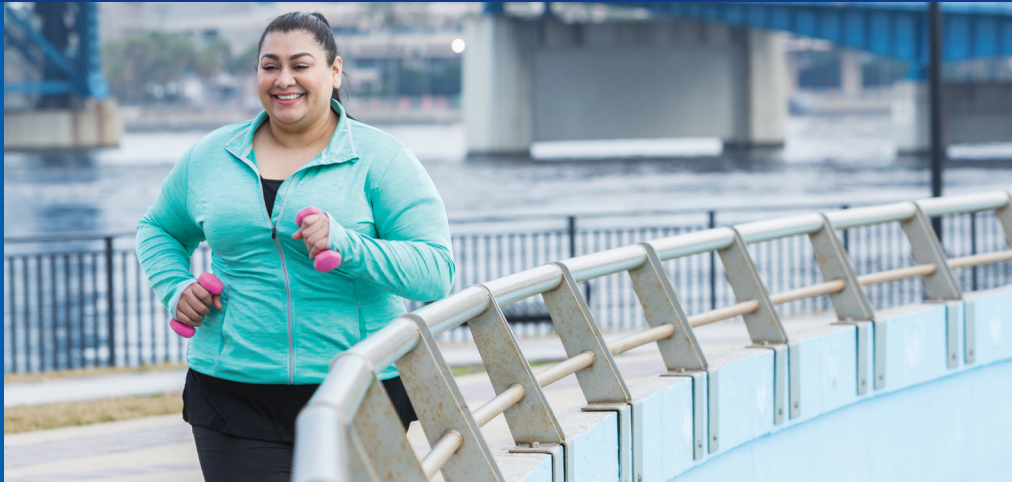
Be more active.

- Work up to at least 30 minutes of activity, 3–4 times per week.
- If you don't have 30 minutes, try to find two 15-minute periods, or even three 10-minute periods.



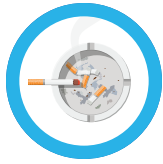
Drink alcohol in moderation.

- No more than 2 drinks a day for men.
- No more than 1 drink a day for women.



Eat heart healthy.

- Include fruit, veggies and whole grains in your diet.
- Choose lean meats like chicken or fish.
- Use low-fat dairy like 1% or fat-free milk.
- Avoid foods that are high in fat, like fast food.



Quit smoking.

Smoking causes:

- Higher blood pressure.
- Harm to blood vessels.
- Heart disease.
- Higher chance of stroke.



Use less salt (sodium).

- Aim for less than 1 teaspoon of salt per day. That's about 2,300 mg.
- Read labels to check how much salt is in the foods you eat. Foods like soup, bread and frozen meals tend to be high in salt. Pick foods that have less salt.
- Use spices or herbs to season food while cooking, not the salt shaker.
- Limit fast food.

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Have an action plan.

Make a blood pressure action plan (shown on the next page) and take it with you on your next doctor's visit.

Don't give up if your blood pressure doesn't come down right away.

It can take a few months to find the right treatment. You may have to try more than one medicine in order to find the best one for you. If you're having trouble making healthy choices, ask your doctor's team about programs and treatments that may help.



Ask your doctor or nurse to show you how to take your blood pressure correctly and how to record the numbers.



Your blood pressure action plan.

Bring this with you when you visit your doctor. It will help you create a blood pressure action plan that works for you.



My blood pressure goal: _____ My blood pressure today: _____

I should take my blood pressure at home? Y / N If yes, how often? _____

My blood pressure is too high if my numbers look like this:

Systolic (top number)				
Diastolic (bottom number)				

My blood pressure is too low if my numbers look like this:

Systolic (top number)				
Diastolic (bottom number)				

If I have these symptoms, I should call my doctor:

Sick to my stomach Headache Blurry vision Other: _____

Steps to help prevent problems:

Take my medications as ordered Limit salt or sodium in my food Stop smoking

Be physically active every day for: _____ Other: _____

Doctor _____ gave me these directions on _____
Doctor's Name Date



Helpful resources.



For more information, visit these websites:

American Heart Association

heart.org
1-800-AHA-USA-1

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/hbp/
1-301-592-8573

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

cdc.gov/bloodpressure

UnitedHealthcare Community Plan

myuhc.com/CommunityPlan
UHCCommunityPlan.com/CA



Important contacts:

Doctor's name: _____ **Phone:** _____

Pharmacy: _____ **Phone:** _____

Urgent Care: _____ **Phone:** _____

Hospital: _____ **Phone:** _____

If there's an emergency, call 911.

UHCCommunityPlan.com/CA



References: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov/bloodpressure)

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