

Hypertension

Hypertension is known as the silent killer. Uncontrolled high blood pressure rarely causes symptoms but always does some long-term damage. Heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure, heart failure, erectile dysfunction and eye damage are all consequences of uncontrolled high blood pressure. Taking blood pressure pills for a month or two does not cure hypertension. High blood pressure requires life-long treatment.

Exercise and weight loss are both important for reducing your blood pressure. Rarely, however, does that sufficiently control your blood pressure and allow you to avoid medication. Keeping your diet low in fats and quitting smoking are even more important if you have hypertension.

Everyone who has hypertension should have a blood pressure cuff for home use. You should have a small notebook where you can record your blood pressure readings. That notebook should be brought to our appointment so we can see what your blood pressure is throughout your typical day. Monitoring your blood pressure at home also helps show us if the blood pressure pill is too strong for you.

By monitoring your blood pressure several times a day when you first get the cuff, you will get an idea of your body's reaction to your typical stresses. Some have higher blood pressure in the morning, some when they return home from work. If you can, even bring it to work a few times to see what your day's routine does to your blood pressure. Most people find that a binge of alcohol drinking causes a really high blood pressure the next morning. Cold medicines and other over-the-counter medications can raise your blood pressure. If you have your own blood pressure cuff you can see if it affects you and whether you need to avoid those.

There are lots of different medications to help control your blood pressure. Each one has its own set of potential side effects. Rather than list the side effects, if you do notice that you're not feeling up to par on the blood pressure medicine, please write down the symptoms and what your blood pressure is at the time that you're having those symptoms. Then please discuss that with us so we can find the best blood pressure medicine for you. If cost is a concern, please mention that and we will either find a less expensive generic or see what samples we might have to give you.

Some people only take the blood pressure medicine when they feel like their blood pressure is high. This is a bad way to take your blood pressure medication, because even if you are otherwise young and healthy hypertension can cause gradual damage to your heart, lungs, and brain. Sleep apnea can also cause hypertension for some people.

Your blood pressure should be under 140 for the top number (systolic) and under 85 for the bottom number (diastolic). You should get a blood pressure cuff that fits you (try it on in the store- ask the pharmacist for help) and get the kind that goes around the upper arm. The others (wrist, finger) are more expensive and not as accurate. The machines give a digital readout, you do not need to use a stethoscope.

Eat a heart-healthy diet, including potassium and fiber, and drink plenty of water.

- Exercise regularly -- at least 30 minutes a day.
- If you smoke, quit -- find a program that will help you stop.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink -- 1 drink a day for women, 2 a day for men.
- Limit the amount of sodium (salt) you eat -- aim for less than 1,500 mg per day.
- Reduce stress -- try to avoid things that cause stress for you. You can also try meditation or yoga.
- Stay at a healthy body weight – even if you need to find a weight-loss program!



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