



## What About African Americans and High Blood Pressure?

African Americans in the U.S. have a higher prevalence of high blood pressure (HBP) than other racial and ethnic groups. It is also often more severe in blacks, and some medications are less effective in treating HBP in blacks.

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. That's why it's called the "silent killer." The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have your healthcare provider check it regularly.



### What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood against the walls of the arteries. Blood pressure results from two forces. One is created by the heart as it pumps blood into the arteries and through the circulatory system. The other is the force on the arteries as the heart rests between beats. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

### What should my blood pressure be?

**Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg.** The top number (systolic) is the pressure when the heart beats. The bottom number (diastolic) is the pressure when the heart rests between beats.

If you're an adult with a systolic blood pressure of 120 to 129 mm Hg, and your diastolic pressure is less than 80 mm Hg, you have elevated blood pressure. High blood pressure is a pressure of 130 systolic or higher, or 80 diastolic or higher, that stays high over time.

### How often should I have my blood pressure checked?

Your doctor may take several readings over time before making a judgment about your blood pressure.

For proper diagnosis of HBP, your healthcare provider will use an average based on two or more readings obtained on two or more occasions.

Checking your blood pressure is quick and painless. You can have it done in a doctor's office, hospital, clinic, nurse's office, pharmacy, company clinic or health fair. You can also purchase a home blood pressure monitor so you can check it at home. Your doctor will tell you how often you should have it checked.

### How can high blood pressure affect me?

Left uncontrolled or undetected, HBP can damage blood vessels in various parts of your body. And 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 and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.

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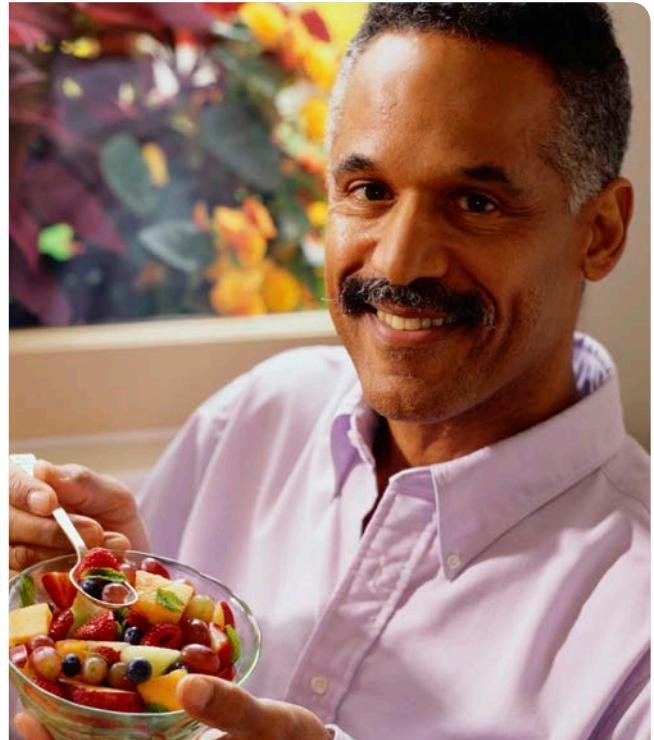


- Eat a healthy diet that is low in saturated and trans fats and rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.
- Aim to consume less than 1,500 mg/day of sodium (salt). Even reducing your daily intake by 1000 mg can help.
- Eat foods rich in potassium. Aim for 3,500 – 5,000 mg of dietary potassium per day.
- Limit alcohol to no more than one drink a day if you're a woman or two drinks a day if you're a man.
- Be more physically active. Aim for at least 90 to 150 minutes of aerobic and/or dynamic resistance exercise per week and/or three sessions of isometric resistance exercises per week.

### What about medications?

Depending on your risk and blood pressure levels, you may be prescribed one or more medications in addition to lifestyle changes.

In African Americans, thiazide-type diuretics (water pills) and/or calcium channel blockers (CCBs) are more effective in lowering blood pressure when given alone or as initial medicines in a multidrug regimen.



Your healthcare provider will determine your level of risk and work with you to choose the best treatment options.

### 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 to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine 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 the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**How is high blood pressure treated?**

**What type of diet would be most helpful?**

### My Questions:

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