

What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force your blood exerts on the walls of your blood vessels. It is measured by two numbers: for example, "140 over 90." The top number (systolic pressure) measures the pressure of the blood in your arteries right after your heart beats. The bottom number (diastolic pressure) measures the pressure of the blood in your arteries right before your heart beats.

What is Normal Blood Pressure?

For a long time, the ideal blood pressure was said to be 120/80. We now set the acceptable range as below **140/90** for adults under 60 years old and below **150/90** for adults above 60 years old.



Why Does High Blood Pressure Matter?

Blood carries energy, oxygen, and nutrients to every muscle and organ in the body. If your blood pressure is high, the system is too stressed to deliver oxygen and nutrients effectively. As a result, over time each organ system will sustain damage from this high pressure system.

According to the National Institutes of Health, high blood pressure leads to more than half of all heart attacks, strokes, and heart failure cases in the United States each year. It also increases the risk of kidney failure and blindness. Nearly one in three Americans has high blood pressure. For more than two-thirds of these people, high blood pressure is not controlled.



All About Blood Pressure

Welborne United Methodist Church

920 Maybeury Drive, Richmond, VA 23229

www.welbornechurch.org



Adapted from WebMD and the Mayo Clinic. This is for informational purposes only; always consult your health care provider for medical information.

What causes high blood pressure?

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, occurs more often as people become older. As people age, the blood vessels become less elastic and a higher pressure is needed to push the blood through these vessels. Hypertension is also more common in African Americans and people with any of the following: a family history of hypertension; high salt intake; excessive alcohol ingestion; consumption of tobacco; or obesity.

What are the symptoms of Hypertension?

There are few symptoms associated with hypertension. Some individuals with hypertension may experience the following symptoms: headache; dizziness; nosebleeds; visual changes; drowsiness; fatigue. However, the majority of people with high blood pressure do not feel anything. This is why high blood pressure is often referred to as a "silent disease," because it injures internal organs but lacks symptoms until there is significant damage. Therefore, the only way to tell if you have hypertension is to have your blood pressure measured.

What else should I know?

How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

Your doctor should measure your blood pressure at each clinic visit. You should relax and avoid smoking or caffeine-containing products (such as coffee or soda) at least 30 minutes before your blood pressure reading. Your doctor will measure your blood pressure while you are sitting. If your blood pressure is high, your doctor may repeat the blood pressure reading after a few minutes to confirm the results. Your doctor will discuss the results with you and the various treatment options available to you.

Hypertension is almost always a long-term problem.

For the vast majority of people, hypertension is a chronic condition that requires life-long treatment by changes in lifestyle AND by medication. Most patients will eventually require two or more drugs to control their hypertension. Some evidence now shows that patients started on more than one drug may respond better than patients started on a single drug, particularly if their pressure remains above 150/90 after attempts at lifestyle changes such as weight loss and exercise.

Take hypertension seriously.

If you have hypertension, you have a greater chance of having a heart attack, a stroke, or kidney problems. By lowering your blood pressure, you are lowering your chances of having a life-threatening or disabling event.



You can help yourself.

Simple lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy diet, increasing exercise, avoiding tobacco smoke, and maintaining a healthy weight can help reduce blood pressure. Lifestyle changes are recommended for everyone with high blood pressure. In fact, it is lifestyle changes, not medications, which will be your initial defense against hypertension. Those who have very high blood pressure, or evidence of heart disease/organ damage due to high blood pressure will need additional interventions. Ask your doctor if he or she recommends home blood pressure monitoring. That way you can keep track of your blood pressure and how well your lifestyle changes are working.