



Put down that saltshaker, and get the numbers you need to know

You may think you know all the important numbers in your life, but you may not know one of the most important — your blood pressure.

As blood is pumped through your arteries, it exerts a force against the inside wall. This is your blood pressure. Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers: The top — systolic — number represents the pressure while the heart is beating. The bottom — diastolic — number represents the pressure when the heart is resting between beats. Normal blood pressure is below 140 systolic and 90 diastolic, or 140/90.

Some facts about high blood pressure

- High blood pressure (hypertension) killed 42,997 Americans in 1999 and contributed to the deaths of another 227,000.
- High blood pressure increases the risk for heart disease and stroke, both leading causes of death in the United States. It can also lead to damage to the eyes and kidneys.
- About one in four American adults have high blood pressure. It affects about one in three African Americans, one in five Hispanics and Native Americans, and one in six Asians.
- About a third of the people with high blood pressure don't know they have it.
- High blood pressure is easily detectable and usually controllable with lifestyle modifications, with or without medications.

Since high blood pressure usually has no symptoms, you need to have it checked at least every two years.

Some risk factors you can't control

- Aging
- Family history of heart disease
- Ethnicity



Some risk factors you can control

- Smoking — If you smoke, talk to your doctor about a program to help you quit.
- Poor diet — Eat well-balanced meals and cut back on food high in cholesterol and fat. Eat more whole-grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables. Use little or no salt on your food.
- Overweight and physically inactive — Talk to your doctor about starting a regular exercise program. Lose weight.
- Stress — Lower the stress in your life through deep breathing exercises and other relaxation techniques.
- Medication — Always take your medication as prescribed by your doctor.

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