

High Blood Pressure—What Is It?

“How could I have high blood pressure? I feel fine.”

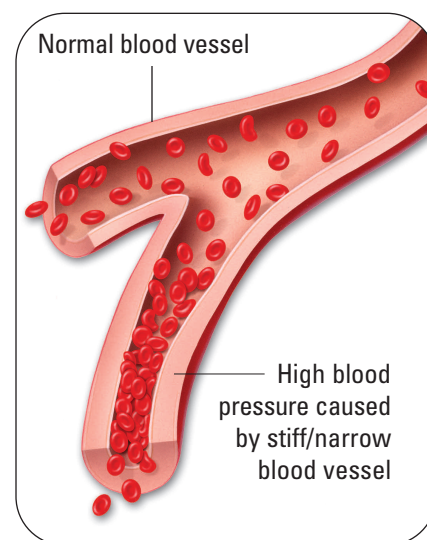
High blood pressure is called a "silent killer" because it usually does not cause any symptoms. Learn more about high blood pressure and how to treat it.

What is blood pressure?

Your heart pumps oxygen-rich blood through blood vessels to all parts of your body. Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of your blood vessels. Normal blood vessels are wide open and the blood moves freely. This leads to normal blood pressure.

What is high blood pressure?

- High blood pressure occurs when your blood vessels become stiffer and more narrow.
- Your heart has to work harder to push blood through the blood vessels to all parts of your body.
- If high blood pressure is not treated, it can lead to serious health problems like heart attack and stroke.



“What causes high blood pressure?”

There are many risk factors for high blood pressure. Some of these risk factors can be controlled and others cannot:

Risk Factors You Cannot Control	Risk Factors You Can Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older age • Family history of high blood pressure • Race (African Americans are at higher risk) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being overweight • Drinking too much alcohol • Eating too much salt • Inactive lifestyle • Smoking • Stress

Taking care of high blood pressure every day

Talk to your doctor about the changes you can make to lower your blood pressure.

- Get your blood pressure checked at every visit.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Follow a healthy diet that is low in salt (sodium) and fat.
- Start a regular exercise program.
- If you smoke, ask about ways to quit.
- Try to lose weight and keep it off.
- Take your medicine as directed.

Use a goal checklist. Set goals that you are ready to reach.