



let's talk about

High Blood Pressure and Stroke

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, means that the force of blood flowing through the blood vessels is consistently too high. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure.

Two numbers represent blood pressure. The upper (systolic) number is the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The lower (diastolic) number is the pressure while your heart rests between beats. The systolic number is always listed first. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120-129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130-139	or	80-89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg. The diagnosis of high blood pressure has different stages escalating in seriousness. These stages range from **elevated** — for adults, that’s a systolic pressure from 120 to 129 but a normal diastolic pressure — to a **hypertensive crisis**, when readings exceed 180/120 mm Hg. A hypertensive crisis requires immediate medical attention.

How does high blood pressure increase stroke risk?

High blood pressure adds to your heart’s workload and damages your arteries and organs over time. Compared with people whose blood pressure is normal, people with high blood pressure are more likely to have a stroke.

Damaged arteries can clog more easily. About 87% of strokes occur when a blood vessel feeding the brain gets blocked, usually by a clot. This is an ischemic stroke.

Blood vessels also can be weaker due to aging and the constant strain of high blood pressure. Over time, the vessels no longer hold up to the pressure and rupture. This is a hemorrhagic stroke. About 13% of strokes are this type.

Am I at higher risk for high blood pressure?

Various risk factors increase your chances of developing high blood pressure. Some you can improve or treat, and some you can’t.

Those that can be improved or treated are:

- Cigarette smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke
- Diabetes
- Being overweight or obese
- High cholesterol
- Physical inactivity
- Poor diet (high in sodium, low in potassium, and drinking too much alcohol)

(continued)



Factors that can't be changed or are difficult to control:

- Family history of high blood pressure
- Race/ethnicity
- Increasing age
- Gender
- Chronic kidney disease
- Obstructive sleep apnea

Socioeconomic status and psychosocial stress may also contribute to high blood pressure. These can affect access to basic living necessities, medication and health care professionals, and the ability to make healthy lifestyle changes.



The only way to know your blood pressure is high is to check it regularly.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1** Call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit stroke.org to learn more about stroke or find local support groups.
- 2** Sign up for our monthly *Stroke Connection* e-news for stroke survivors and caregivers at StrokeConnection.org.
- 3** Connect with others who have also had an experience with stroke by joining our Support Network at stroke.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional:

What should my blood pressure be?

How often should my blood pressure be checked?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit stroke.org/LetsTalkAboutStroke to learn more.