

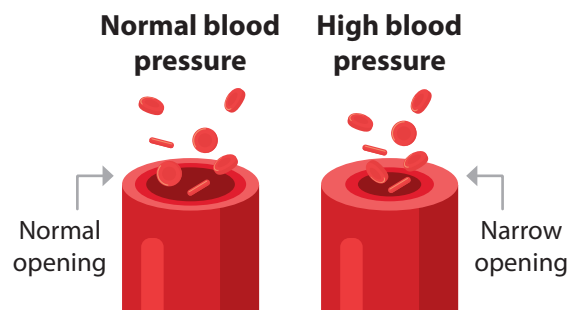
# High Blood Pressure and Your Health

## Managing the Silent Killer

### What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing on the walls of your blood vessels. High blood pressure, also called **hypertension**, means that your blood pressure is too high on a regular basis.

Untreated high blood pressure can harm your blood vessels. Over time, this damage can lead to stroke, heart attack, kidney disease, vision loss, sexual dysfunction, or heart failure.



*Untreated high blood pressure can cause blood vessels to narrow, which may lead to other serious health problems.*

### Treating high blood pressure can:

- Lower your risk of life-threatening conditions
- Keep you out of the hospital
- Help you live longer

### Ways to manage high blood pressure:

- Take prescribed medicine
- Monitor your blood pressure
- Increase physical activity
- Eat a healthy diet



### How do I know if my blood pressure is high?

When blood pressure is high, you may not feel like anything is wrong, but over time it may cause damage that can threaten your health. This is why hypertension is called the **“silent killer.”**

### Understanding your blood pressure reading:



#### Systolic pressure (top number)

When your heart squeezes blood out of your heart to the rest of the body



#### Diastolic pressure (bottom number)

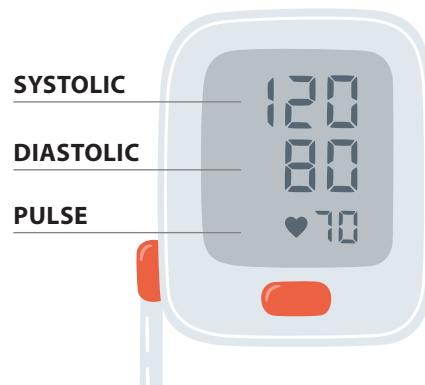
When your heart relaxes between beats, allowing your heart to fill with blood



#### Pulse (also known as heart rate)

How fast or slow your heart is beating

### Blood pressure monitor



Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg)

# Take control of your blood pressure with lifestyle changes

## WEIGHT LOSS

**Average blood pressure decrease: 5–20 mmHg**

If you are overweight, losing 5–20 pounds can make a big difference in your blood pressure. Talk to your health care provider to determine a healthy target weight for you.



## EXERCISE/ACTIVITY

**Average blood pressure decrease: 4–9 mmHg**

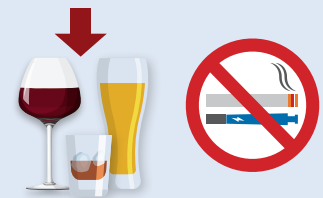
Move throughout the day unless your health care provider tells you differently. Try to slowly increase your weekly physical activity to a moderate-intensity level of exercise. Thirty minutes of physical activity that increases your heart rate 5 days a week is an example of moderate-intensity exercise.



## ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO

**Average blood pressure decrease: 2–20 mmHg**

Men should limit alcohol to less than 2 drinks a day. Women should limit alcohol to less than 1 drink a day. Aim to quit smoking tobacco, chewing tobacco, or vaping. Talk to your provider about ways to quit. Call VA's tobacco quitline: **1-855-QUIT-VET** or **Text VET to 47848** to sign up for the VA's quit tobacco text messaging program.



## EATING HEALTHY

**Average blood pressure decrease: 2–14 mmHg**

### Maintain a balanced diet including:



- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole grains
- Low-fat dairy products
- Poultry and fish
- Nuts and beans



### Limit amount of:

- Saturated and trans fats
- Sodium—aim for less than 2,300 mg per day from all sources
- Red meat (if you do eat red meat, select leanest cuts available)
- Sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages



**? DID YOU KNOW**

**Did you know that 70% of the sodium you get is from eating fast foods or at restaurants? Fast food should be “sometimes food.”**

**Tip:** Instead of french fries, ask for a side salad or vegetables.



**Consider the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan.** Ask your health care provider to speak with a dietitian.

**DASH eating plan**

## Medicines used to lower blood pressure

Your health care provider will choose the medicines that are right for you. They may need to prescribe more than one medicine. It is important to continue taking your previous blood pressure medicines even when new ones are added. Only stop medicines if your health care provider tells you to stop them.



ACE Inhibitor or ARB	Thiazide-type diuretics (mild water pills)	Calcium channel blockers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relaxes blood vessels</li> <li>Reduces stress on your heart</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases the amount you urinate</li> <li>Relaxes blood vessels and reduces blood volume</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relaxes blood vessels</li> <li>Reduces stress on your heart</li> </ul>
<b>Common medicines:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lisinopril</li> <li>losartan</li> </ul>	<b>Common medicines:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>hydrochlorothiazide</li> <li>chlorthalidone</li> </ul>	<b>Common medicines:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>amlodipine</li> <li>nifedipine</li> </ul>

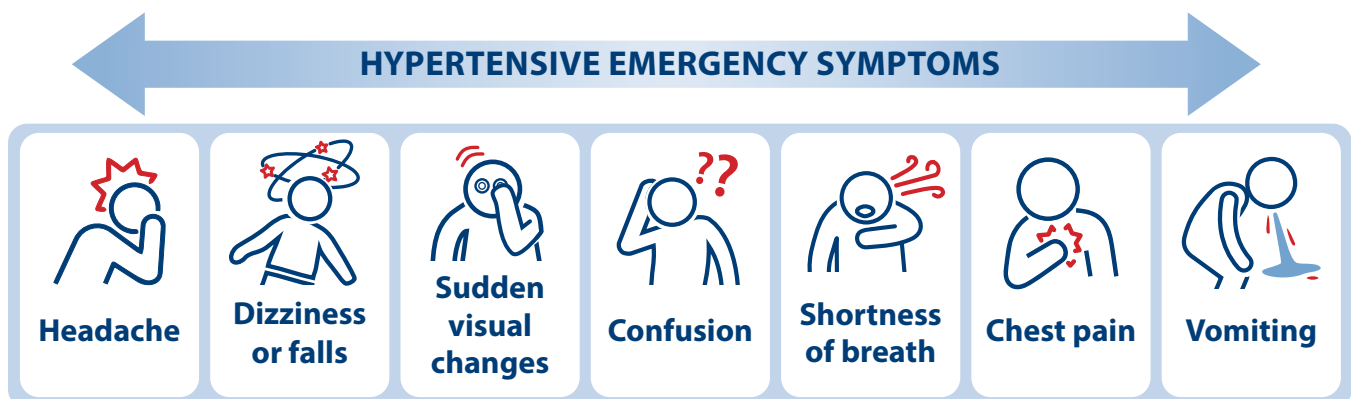
### Other medicines you may be taking that help lower blood pressure:\*

- spironolactone
- metoprolol tartrate or succinate
- carvedilol
- atenolol
- hydralazine
- clonidine

\*You may be prescribed other medications that can lower blood pressure but are not always used to treat high blood pressure.

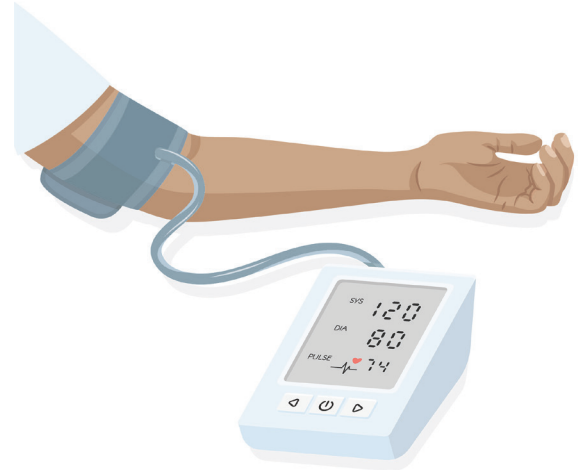
## When to seek medical attention

<b>Hypertensive emergency</b>	<b>BP 180/120 mmHg or higher with symptoms</b> (see list below)	<b>Call 911</b>
<b>Hypertensive urgency</b>	BP 180/120 mmHg or higher without symptoms (see list below)	Call your health care provider
<b>Hypotension (low blood pressure)</b>	BP 90/60 mmHg or lower with dizziness	Call your health care provider



## Measuring blood pressure at home

- 1 Avoid nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol 30 minutes before taking blood pressure.
- 2 Empty your bladder.
- 3 Sit quietly and relax for 5 minutes.
- 4 Do not talk. Breathe normally.
- 5 Sit upright with back supported.
- 6 Keep both feet flat on the floor.
- 7 Use correct cuff size.
- 8 Pull blood pressure cuff tight.
- 9 Support the arm on a flat surface at heart level with your palm facing up.

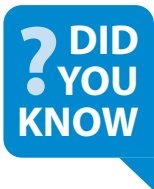


### CUFF PLACEMENT

Place the cuff directly above the bend of the elbow on bare skin (not over clothes). Watch **this video** to see how to measure blood pressure at home.



[Home Blood Pressure Monitoring Video](#)



Decreasing your blood pressure numbers by 10–20 mmHg can lower your risk of heart disease by **up to 50%**.



## My blood pressure information

My blood pressure medicine(s): \_\_\_\_\_

When to check blood pressure: \_\_\_\_\_

My blood pressure goal is no more than:  130/90 mmHg  140/90 mmHg

Individualized goal\*: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Based on age, other conditions, and fall risk (example 150/90).

Contact your provider if blood pressure or heart rate is lower than: \_\_\_\_\_

Clinic contact information: \_\_\_\_\_