

Blood Pressure 101

Understanding High Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood against your artery walls as it circulates through your body. Blood pressure normally rises and falls throughout the day, but it can cause health problems if it stays high for a long time. Having high blood pressure raises your risk for heart disease and stroke, the first and third leading causes of death in the United States.

Two Key Terms: Diastolic And Systolic

Blood pressure is measured using two numbers. The first number (systolic) represents the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats. The second number (diastolic) represents the pressure in your vessels when your heart rests between beats. If the measurement reads 120 systolic and 80 diastolic, you would say “120 over 80” or write “120/80 mmHg.”

Measuring Your Blood Pressure

Measuring your blood pressure is quick and painless. A doctor or health professional wraps an inflatable cuff with a pressure gauge around your arm to squeeze the blood vessels. Then he or she listens to your pulse with a stethoscope while releasing air from the cuff and watching the gauge. The gauge measures blood pressure in millimeters of mercury, which is abbreviated as mmHg.

Effects Of High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure can damage your health in many ways.

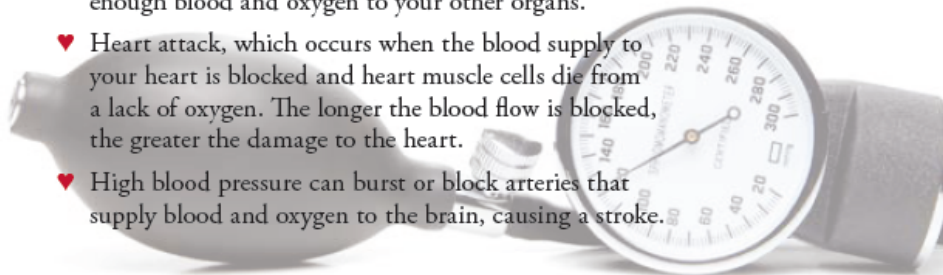
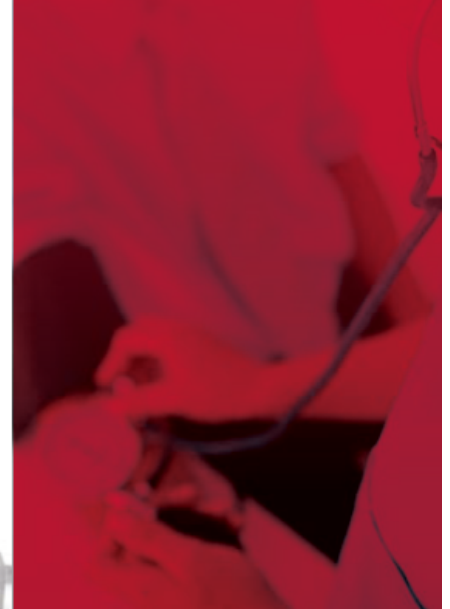
For instance, it can harden the arteries, decreasing the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart. This reduced flow can cause—

- ♥ Chest pain, also called angina.
- ♥ Heart failure, which occurs when the heart can't pump enough blood and oxygen to your other organs.
- ♥ Heart attack, which occurs when the blood supply to your heart is blocked and heart muscle cells die from a lack of oxygen. The longer the blood flow is blocked, the greater the damage to the heart.
- ♥ High blood pressure can burst or block arteries that supply blood and oxygen to the brain, causing a stroke.

Blood Pressure Signs & Symptoms

High blood pressure is called the “silent killer” because many people don't realize they have it. High blood pressure often has no warning signs or symptoms.

The only way to detect whether or not you have high blood pressure is to have it measured by a doctor or health professional—it is quick and painless. Get your blood pressure checked today.



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