

# KNOW YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

**H**igh blood pressure – also called hypertension – usually has no warning signs or symptoms, so many people don't even know they have reason to be concerned. That is why hypertension is often referred to as a silent killer. According to the Center for Disease Control, about 67 million American adults, or 1 in 3 have high blood pressure, but even more disturbing is the fact that only about half have their condition under control.

Untreated hypertension increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. These are the first and fifth commonest causes of death according to the CDC. Hypertension can also damage blood vessels in the kidneys reducing their ability to work properly, and can increase the risk of blindness and dementia. By controlling blood pressure, you can avoid these serious health conditions.

## What is 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. High blood pressure can lead to heart disease and stroke—leading causes of death in the United States.

Your doctor measures your blood pressure by wrapping 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. The gauge measures the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart beats (systolic) and when it rests (diastolic). Blood pressure readings are expressed as two numbers, such as 120/80, where the top number is the pressure exerted on the arteries when the heart is contracting and the bottom number is the pressure exerted when the heart is at rest.

BLOOD PRESSURE LEVELS	
NORMAL	systolic: less than 120 mmHg diastolic: less than 80 mmHg
AT RISK (prehypertension)	systolic: 120–139 mmHg diastolic: 80–89 mmHg
HIGH	systolic: 140 mmHg or higher diastolic: 90 mmHg or higher

## Controlling Blood Pressure

The most important thing you can do is see your physician regularly and have your blood pressure checked. Other things you can do to reduce your risks include maintaining a healthy



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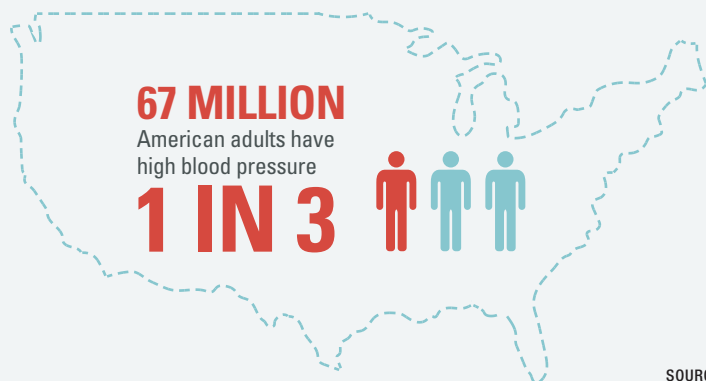
weight, reducing your sodium intake, quitting smoking, lowering your cholesterol if your levels are high, controlling your diabetes, exercising and taking medications as prescribed. Several factors that are beyond your control can increase your risk for high blood pressure. These include your age, sex, and race or ethnicity. If possible, know your family history so you can take steps to lower your risk.

Check your blood pressure regularly. High blood pressure is a common and dangerous condition, but it is manageable. If you have high blood pressure, your doctor may prescribe medication to treat it. Lifestyle changes, such as the ones listed above, can be just as important as taking medicines.

Talk with your doctor about the best ways to reduce your risk for high blood pressure. Enjoy today, live to see tomorrow.

**Michael J. Hora**  
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### ◀ HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE BASICS ▶



High blood pressure  
contributes to  
**~1,000**  
**DEATHS/DAY**

SOURCES: <http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure>, <http://millionhearts.hhs.gov>

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