



American
Heart
Association.

ANSWERS
by heart



Cardiovascular Conditions

What About African Americans and High Blood Pressure?

African Americans in the U.S. have a higher prevalence of high blood pressure (HBP) than other racial and ethnic groups. It is also often more severe in Black people and some medications are less effective in treating Black people with HBP.

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. That's why it's called the "silent killer." The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have your health care professional check it regularly.



What's blood pressure?

When your heart beats, it pumps blood into your blood vessels. This creates pressure against the blood vessel walls. This blood pressure causes your blood to flow to all parts of your body. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

What should my blood pressure be?

Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg. The top, or larger, number is the systolic pressure. It's the pressure in your arteries when the heart beats. The bottom, or smaller, number is diastolic pressure. This is the pressure when the heart rests between beats. If you're an adult with a systolic blood pressure of 120 to 129 mm Hg, and your diastolic pressure is less than 80 mm Hg, you have elevated blood pressure. High blood pressure is a pressure of 130 systolic or higher and/or 80 diastolic or higher that stays high over time.

How often should I have my blood pressure checked?

For proper diagnosis of HBP, your health care professional will use an average based on two or more readings obtained on two or more occasions.

Checking your blood pressure is quick and painless. You can have it done at a doctor's office, hospital, clinic, nurse's office, pharmacy, company clinic or health fair. You can also purchase a home blood pressure monitor so you can check it at home. Your health care professional will tell you how often you should have it checked.

How can high blood pressure affect me?

Left uncontrolled or undetected, HBP can damage blood vessels in various parts of your body. And the longer it's left untreated, the more likely organs such as your heart, brain, kidneys or eyes will be damaged. This can lead to heart attack, stroke, heart failure, kidney disease, erectile dysfunction and loss of vision.

What can I do about about my blood pressure?

Making healthy lifestyle changes is the first step.

- Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a healthy diet that is low in saturated and trans fats and rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products .

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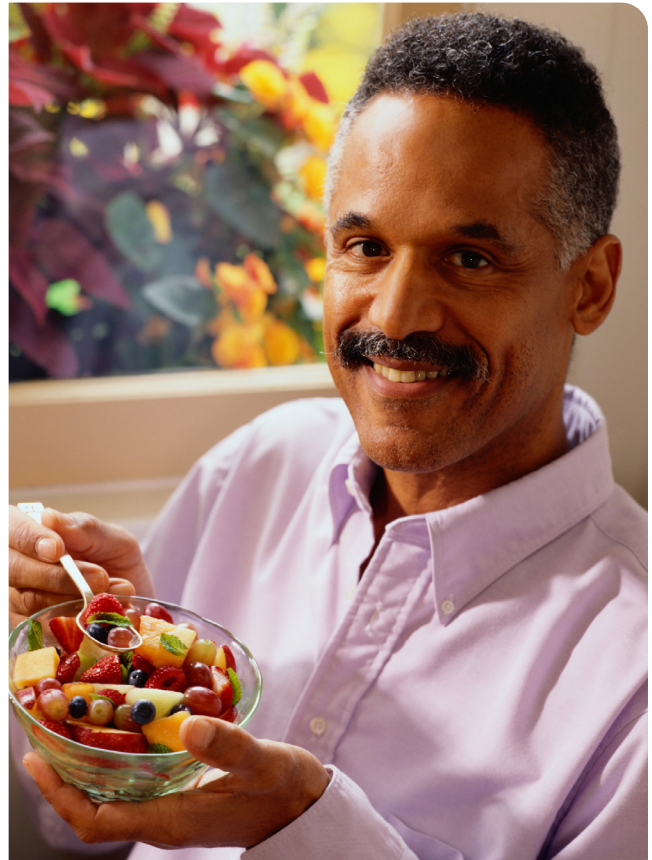
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- Aim to consume less than 1,500 milligrams (mg) per day of sodium (salt). Even reducing your daily intake by 1000 mg can help.
- Eat high potassium foods. Aim for 3,500 – 5,000 mg of dietary potassium per day.
- Limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day for women or two drinks a day for men.
- Be more physically active. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week.

What about medications?

Depending on your risk and blood pressure levels, you may need one or more types of medication in addition to lifestyle changes. In African Americans, thiazide-type diuretics (water pills) and/or calcium channel blockers are more effective in lowering blood pressure when given alone or as initial medicines in a multidrug regimen. You may need a trial period before your health care professional finds the best one, or combination of medications, for you.

If you are prescribed medication, always follow the directions from your health care professional and pharmacist. Don't stop taking the medication unless your health care professional tells you to.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.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.

For example:

How is high blood pressure treated?

What type of diet will help?

MY QUESTIONS:

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