

What is hypertension ?

High blood pressure is a common condition in which the force of the blood against your artery walls is high enough that it may eventually cause health problems, such as heart disease.

Blood pressure is determined by the amount of blood your heart pumps and the amount of resistance to blood flow in your arteries. The more blood your heart pumps and the narrower your arteries, the higher your blood pressure.

You can have high blood pressure (hypertension) for years without any symptoms. Even without symptoms, damage to blood vessels and your heart continues and can be detected. Uncontrolled high blood pressure increases your risk of serious health problems, including heart attack and stroke.

High blood pressure generally develops over many years, and it affects nearly everyone eventually. Fortunately, high blood pressure can be easily detected. And once you know you have high blood pressure, you can work with your doctor to control it.

What are the risk factors?

High blood pressure has many risk factors, including:

Age. The risk of high blood pressure increases as you age. Through early middle age, or about age 45, high blood pressure is more common in men. Women are more likely to develop high blood pressure after age 65.

Family history. High blood pressure tends to run in families.

Being overweight or obese. The more you weigh the more blood you need to supply oxygen and nutrients to your tissues. As the volume of blood circulated through your blood vessels increases, so does the pressure on your artery walls.

Not being physically active. People who are inactive tend to have higher heart rates. The higher your heart rate, the harder your heart must work with each contraction and the stronger the force on your arteries. Lack of physical activity also increases the risk of being overweight.

Using tobacco. Not only does smoking or chewing tobacco immediately raise your blood pressure temporarily, but the chemicals in tobacco can damage the lining of your artery walls. This can cause your arteries to narrow, increasing your blood pressure. Secondhand smoke also can increase your blood pressure.

Too much salt (sodium) in your diet. Too much sodium in your diet can cause your body to retain fluid, which increases blood pressure.

Drinking too much alcohol. Over time, heavy drinking can damage your heart.

Stress. High levels of stress can lead to a temporary increase in blood pressure. If you try to relax by eating more, using tobacco or drinking alcohol, you may only increase problems with high blood pressure.

Certain chronic conditions. Certain chronic conditions also may increase your risk of high blood pressure, such as kidney disease and sleep apnea. Sometimes pregnancy contributes to high blood pressure, as well.

By

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