

“Why is high blood pressure so dangerous?”

High blood pressure usually has no signs or symptoms and puts you at risk for heart disease and stroke, two of the leading causes of death in the United States.



High blood pressure, or hypertension, is called the “silent killer” because you can have it for years without knowing it. Blood pressure is the measure of force pushing against the walls of the arteries. Arteries are the blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to the rest of your body.

When the heart contracts to pump out blood, the peak of contraction is called systolic pressure. After pumping, the heart relaxes and pressure drops to its lowest point, just before a new beat. That lowest point is called the diastolic pressure. The measure of an individual’s blood pressure is always expressed as systolic pressure over diastolic pressure.

The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked. Using a blood pressure cuff and stethoscope or electronic sensor, your doctor or nurse can take your blood pressure and tell you if it’s high.

Stage*	Systolic pressure		Diastolic pressure
Optimal	< 120	AND	< 80
Elevated	120-129	AND	< 80
Stage 1 hypertension	130-139	OR	80-89
Stage 2 hypertension	≥ 140	OR	≥ 90
Hypertensive crisis	> 180	AND/OR	> 120

Normal blood pressure for adults is considered to be below 120/80. Generally, blood pressure above 130/80 is considered to be high for adults.

“Elevated” refers to blood pressure between 120-129 systolic and less than 80 diastolic. People with elevated blood pressure are typically not given medication, but are told to change their lifestyle to help keep their blood pressure from rising. These changes include weight loss, diet, exercise, reducing salt intake and quitting smoking.

**American Heart Association*

