

A Closer Look at Hypertension

EXPERT ADVICE

Hypertension Stats

One in every three adults in the United States has hypertension. Of the 77.9 million American adults with hypertension, only around half have it under control. Leaving hypertension untreated can have deadly results – hypertension was listed as a primary or contributing cause of death in over 348,000 Americans in 2009. And it seems that hypertension is on the rise. According to the American Heart Association, projections show that by 2030, prevalence of hypertension will increase 7.2% from 2013 estimates.

Source: The American Heart Association



Hypertension is the technical term for high blood pressure. If you are diagnosed with the condition, it means that the amount of pressure, or force, your blood is exerting against your body's arterial walls has risen to a dangerous level.

A blood pressure reading greater than 120/80 qualifies as pre-hypertension, a condition that will likely turn more serious if not controlled through lifestyle changes. Stage 1 hypertension (a reading > 140/90) and stage 2 hypertension (a reading > 160/100) usually require the use of blood pressure medications in addition to lifestyle modifications.

Why it's important

If left untreated, hypertension can damage the heart and arteries in several ways. First, it can cause the artery walls to thicken and stiffen, blocking blood flow to your heart, kidneys, brain, arms and legs. Eventually, this can lead to chest pain (angina), heart attack, heart failure, kidney failure, blocked arteries in your legs or arms (peripheral artery disease), and eye damage.

Hypertension can also do significant damage to the brain, which depends on a nourishing blood

supply to work properly. For example, if hypertension causes the brain's blood vessels to weaken, or blood clots to form in the arteries leading to the brain, the result may be a stroke—an event when your brain is deprived of oxygen and nutrients and brain cells begin to die.

Treatment and prevention

The American Heart Association recommends that all adults receive a blood pressure screening at their regular health care visit. If your blood pressure is higher than 120/80, have it checked more often until you are able to get it under control.

While medical treatments like blood thinners can reduce hypertension, the healthiest and most effective long-term way to control hypertension is through lifestyle modification. This may include dieting (eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; limiting intake of sodium and saturated fats; drinking no more than two cups of coffee a day), keeping a healthy weight for your age and height, exercising regularly, not smoking, and making sure to keep stress at a minimum. ❤️