



let's talk about

# High Blood Pressure and Stroke

## What is high blood pressure (HBP)?

High blood pressure means that the force of the blood pushing against the sides of your arteries is consistently in the high range. This can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure.

Two numbers represent blood pressure. The higher (systolic) number shows the pressure while the heart is beating. The lower (diastolic) number shows the pressure when the heart is resting between beats. The systolic number is always listed first.

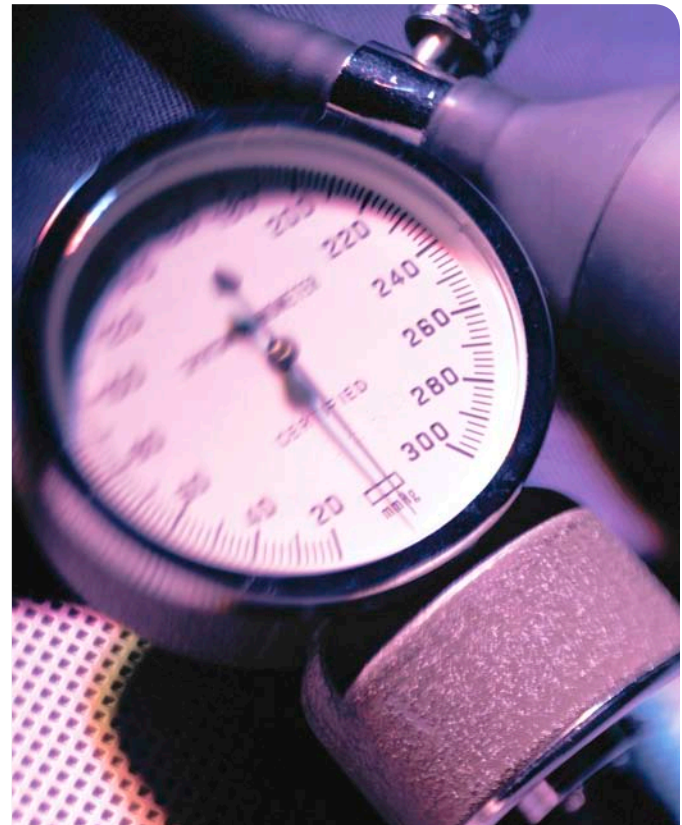
A blood pressure reading of less than 120 over 80 is considered normal for adults. A blood pressure reading equal to or higher than 140 over 90 is high. Blood pressure between 120–139/80–89 is considered “prehypertension” and requires lifestyle changes to reduce the risk of stroke.

## How does high blood pressure increase stroke risk?

High blood pressure is the single most important risk factor for stroke because it's the No. 1 cause of stroke.

HBP adds to your heart's workload and damages your arteries and organs over time. Compared to people whose blood pressure is normal, people with HBP are more likely to have a stroke.

About 87 percent of strokes are caused by narrowed or clogged blood vessels in the brain that cut off the



blood flow to brain cells. This is an **ischemic stroke**. High blood pressure causes damage to the inner lining of the blood vessels. This adds to any blockage that is already within the artery wall.

About 13 percent of strokes occur when a blood vessel ruptures in or near the brain. This is a **hemorrhagic stroke**. Chronic HBP or aging blood vessels are the main causes of this type of stroke. HBP puts more pressure on the blood vessels until they can no longer maintain the pressure and the blood vessel ruptures over time.

## Who is at higher risk for HBP?

- People with a family history of high blood pressure
- African Americans
- People 35 years or older
- People who are overweight or obese
- People who eat too much salt
- People who drink too much alcohol

(continued)



- Women who use birth control pills
- People who aren't physically active
- Pregnant women

### How can I control high blood pressure?

Even if you have had a prior stroke or heart attack, controlling high blood pressure can help prevent another one. Take these steps:

- Lose weight if you're overweight.
- Eat a healthy diet that's low in salt, saturated fat, and *trans* fat.
- Eat fruits and vegetables, and low-fat dairy products.
- Enjoy regular physical activity.
- Limit alcohol to no more than two drinks a day if you're a man and one drink a day if you're a woman. Check with your doctor about drinking alcohol; it can raise blood pressure.
- Take all medicines as prescribed to control your blood pressure.
- Know what your blood pressure should be and try to keep it at that level.



Having high blood pressure does not mean that you're tense or nervous. You can be calm and relaxed and still have high blood pressure. You usually can't tell if you have it. The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have it checked regularly.

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-888-4-STROKE** (1-888-478-7653) to learn more about stroke or find local support groups, or visit **StrokeAssociation.org**.
- 2 Sign up to get *Stroke Connection* magazine, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers at **strokeconnection.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with stroke by joining our Support Network at **strokeassociation.org/supportnetwork**.

### Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**What should my blood pressure be?**

**How often should my blood pressure be checked?**

### My Questions:

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