

Hypertension – The Silent Killer

Hypertension, or high blood pressure (HBP), affects about 50 million Americans. While HBP does not usually have any direct symptoms, the higher the blood pressure (BP), the greater the chance of heart attack, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease and eye disease. When HBP is treated properly, these risks go down. Your BP is measured as two numbers.

A normal BP is 120/80. The systolic, or top, number is the BP in your arteries when the heart squeezes. The diastolic, or bottom, number is the lowest BP and occurs when the heart relaxes. For most people with HBP, the goals should be systolic BP < 140 and diastolic BP < 90. More than half of people with HBP are not aware of it. You can do some things to lower your BP: stop smoking, moderate your alcohol intake, lose weight if you are overweight, exercise, and eat



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healthy foods, including a low salt diet rich in potassium and calcium. However, these lifestyle modifications are not enough for most people with HBP. In fact, most people require two or more medications to achieve their BP goals. Sometimes doctors are not aggressive enough in treating HBP. If your blood pressure is not at its goal, ask your doctor about altering the plan to prevent unnecessary risk.

Your BP should be checked at least monthly when starting medications, then three or four times a year when it is stable. You should also get chemistry bloodwork about twice a year.

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