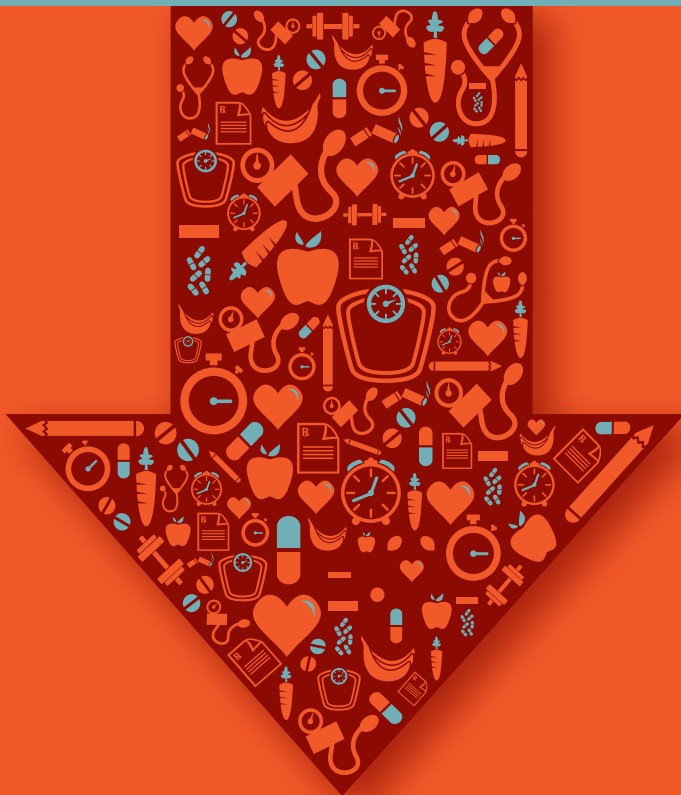




A JOURNAL TO HELP YOU  
MANAGE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE





**Blood pressure can be controlled.  
Make it a team effort.**

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, raises your risk of heart disease, stroke, and other serious conditions. So it's very important to take the medication your doctor has prescribed. Those are the first steps to getting your high blood pressure under control.

You also need the support of family, friends, and health care professionals, such as your pharmacist. Your pharmacist can help answer questions about high blood pressure, your medications, and offer tips to help you maintain a healthy blood pressure.

With the help of this journal, you'll learn how you can manage and control your high blood pressure. You will also learn what questions to ask your pharmacist or doctor if you are worried about your condition or medication. And, you'll get tips on healthy habits that can help save your life. Use this journal on a daily basis to help you reach your blood pressure and health goals.

**So team up with your pharmacist, doctor, and loved ones to get—and keep—your high blood pressure down.**

A person wearing a red shirt is shown from the chest up, with their hands held together to form a heart shape. A semi-transparent red heart is overlaid on the hands. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

## What is high blood pressure? Is it *really* that bad?

If you have high blood pressure, you're not alone. About 67 million U.S. adults have high blood pressure. Nearly half do not have it under control. High blood pressure, a common cause of heart attack and stroke, contributes to nearly 1,000 deaths a day.

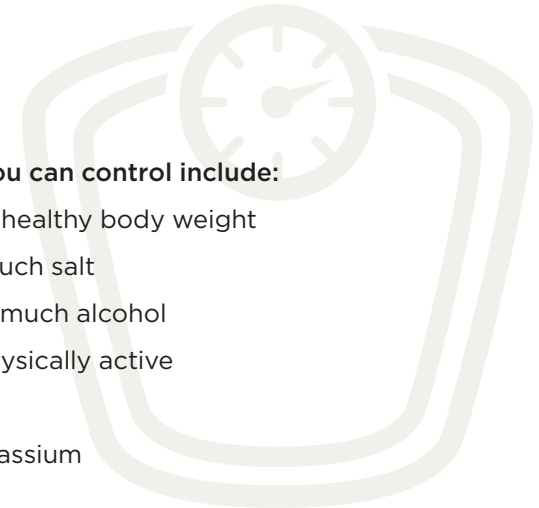
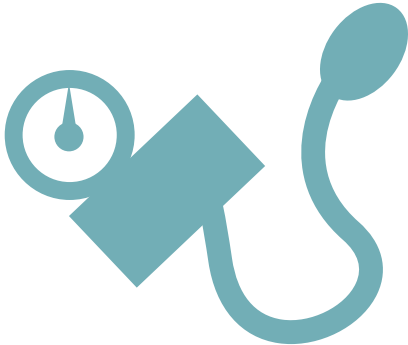
"Blood pressure" measures the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. Your blood pressure naturally goes up and down throughout the day. If it remains high for a long time, you could have high blood pressure.

High blood pressure is unsafe because it makes your heart work harder to pump blood. This can cause damage to the arteries and makes you more likely to experience a heart attack or stroke.

## What causes high blood pressure?

The causes of high blood pressure vary from person to person. Risk factors, such as certain traits, conditions, and habits, can raise your risk. There are two types of risk factors: those you can control and those you cannot control.

For some people, certain medical conditions and medications can cause or add to the risk. For others, habits such as smoking or drinking too much alcohol may cause high blood pressure.



### Risk factors you can control include:

- ▼ Being over a healthy body weight
- ▼ Eating too much salt
- ▼ Drinking too much alcohol
- ▼ Not being physically active
- ▼ Smoking
- ▼ Too little potassium
- ▼ Diabetes
- ▼ Stress

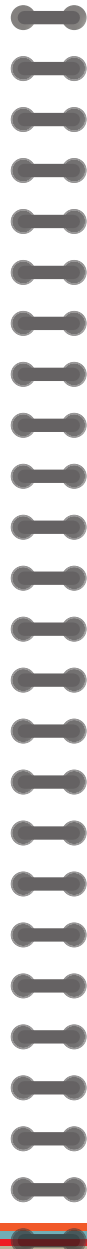
### Risk factors you cannot control include:

- ▼ **Age.** Blood pressure tends to rise as people get older.
- ▼ **Race/ethnicity.** High blood pressure is more common among African Americans than Caucasians or Hispanic-American adults.
- ▼ **Gender.** Fewer adult women have high blood pressure than adult men.
- ▼ **Family history.** You are more likely to have high blood pressure if someone in your family has it.

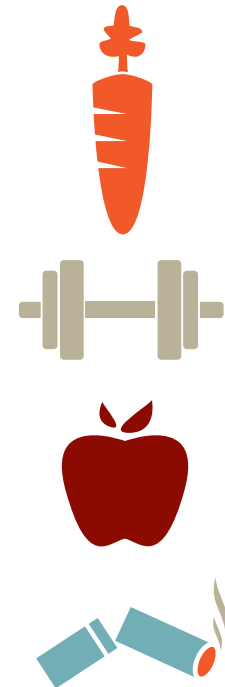
## What are the signs of high blood pressure?


High blood pressure is also called the “silent killer,” because many people have it for years and don’t know it. Often, high blood pressure has no warning signs. By the time it is noticed, it may have already caused serious damage to the heart, blood vessels, and more.

The good news is, when discovered early, high blood pressure can be treated and controlled.



Lifestyle changes can help lower and maintain a healthy blood pressure. Staying on a healthy diet, being physically active, keeping a healthy weight, and not smoking can help you stop or delay problems related to high blood pressure. Keep in mind, the more risk factors you have, the more likely you are to get high blood pressure.

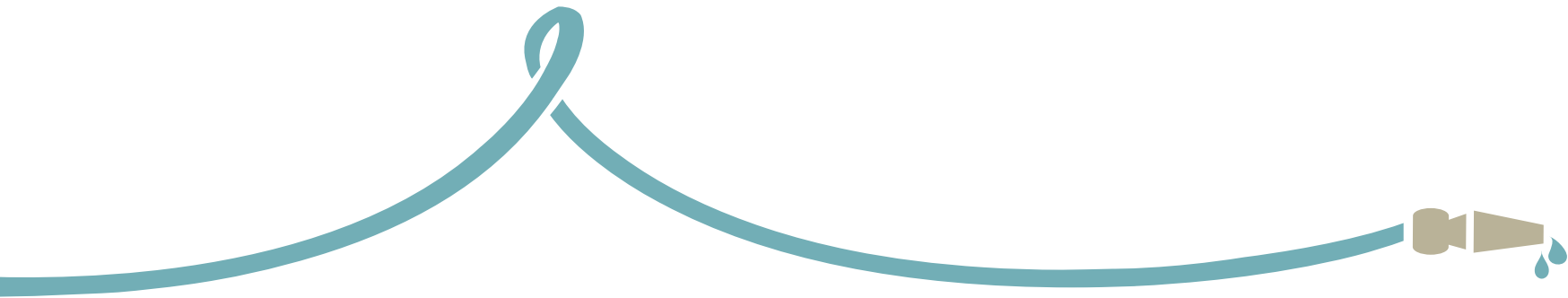




## How is high blood pressure measured?

When you get your blood pressure taken by a professional, it's helpful to know what is being measured. You should also know what it means for your health and how you can track your blood pressure regularly.

Blood pressure is when the heart fills up with blood and then squeezes to push the blood into the blood vessels. Your blood pressure is made up of two numbers—systolic pressure and diastolic pressure. The systolic pressure measures the total pressure it takes the heart to pump blood to the body. When the heart relaxes between beats and fills again with blood, this is diastolic pressure. Blood pressure numbers are written with the systolic number above or before the diastolic number, such as 140/90 mmHg. It is usually measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg).



Work with your pharmacist or doctor to learn what your numbers mean for your health. Depending on your starting level of systolic blood pressure you can, lower your risk of heart attack or stroke by bringing that number down by at least 5mmHg.

**To help you picture how blood pressure works, think of water running through a garden hose.**

The hose is your blood vessels, and the water running through it is your blood. Just as you need plenty of water to grow your garden, your cells need enough blood to circulate in your body to carry oxygen and other things the body needs to stay alive. If you were to turn on the water to your garden hose, you would see it flow freely from one end to the other.

Now, if you were to narrow the flow of water by squeezing or stepping on the hose, the water pressure would build up. The faucet has to “work harder” to get the water through the hose to your garden. This causes extra stress on the faucet, which could cause it to leak or break and not work correctly. Similarly, if you have high blood pressure, it is like squeezing the garden hose. This makes your heart work harder to pump blood and your blood pressure rises. The extra work your heart has to do can cause stress on your heart and lead to a heart attack or stroke.









## How is high blood pressure controlled?

For some people, making healthy changes in their lives can help lower blood pressure. For others, medication may be needed as well. If your doctor gives you one or more medications as part of a treatment plan, be sure to take them as directed.

**Awareness and treatment are the best chances you have to control your high blood pressure and avoid a heart attack or stroke. Work with your pharmacist and doctor to make a plan that works best for you.**



## Your pharmacist can help you manage your high blood pressure.

Did you know that your pharmacist can answer your general high blood pressure questions, and even help you take your blood pressure? Your pharmacist is not only trained to fill your prescriptions, but can help you better understand your condition and the medications you are taking.

If you are starting medication for the first time or if your treatment has changed, talk to your pharmacist. Here are some questions you may want to ask:



- ▼ What is the name of my medication? Is that the brand name or generic name?

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- ▼ What is the dosage of the medication? Are there any special instructions? How will it react in my body?

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- ▼ Can this medication be taken with other prescription and nonprescription medications?

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- ▼ Should this medication be taken with or without food? Are there any foods or drinks to stay away from when taking this medications?

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- ▼ What should I do if I take too much or miss a dose of this medication?

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- ▼ What side effects should I watch for? If I contact you about possible side effects will you share that information with my doctor or do I need to contact my doctor separately?

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- ▼ Should I make sure to stay away from certain activities while taking this medication?

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- ▼ What time of day should I take my medication?

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- ▼ Are there any other things (such as blood pressure cuffs, pain medication, or vitamins) that may help me manage my blood pressure?

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- ▼ What can I do if I lose or run out of medication?

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- ▼ Where can I find out more about this drug(s) or my condition (on the Internet or in health and medical articles)?

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- ▼ Where on my pill bottle can I find the above information?

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## Taking your medications as directed.

There are many reasons why you may not take your medications as prescribed, but remember it is very important to follow your doctor's directions. Ask your pharmacist to remind you what your doctor told you about your prescription. Not taking your medicines as prescribed can have a serious impact on your overall health. If you are concerned about bad reactions or side effects, the high cost, or are overwhelmed by the number of medicines you have to take, talk with your pharmacist. He/she can discuss them with your doctor and together they might suggest:

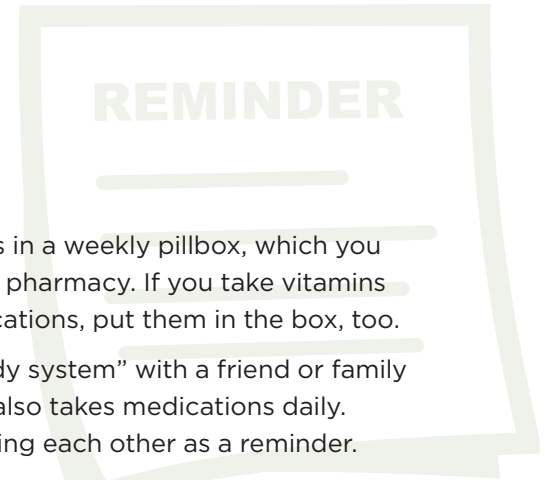
- ▼ Other prescription medications or over-the-counter treatments that may have fewer side effects.

- ▼ Ways to simplify your daily medication routine to cut down on the number of times a day and/or medications you take.
- ▼ Generic medications available at a lower cost, or recommend a prescription assistance program to help you afford your medication.

## What if I miss a day of taking my medications?

In general, missing one day isn't serious. Ask your pharmacist what to do if that happens. Of course, it's best to take your medicine(s) regularly and as prescribed. Here are some helpful ways to remind yourself:

- ▼ Keep your medications somewhere that you will see them—on the nightstand or next to your toothbrush.
- ▼ Take them at the same time(s) every day, and connect them with established routines like brushing your teeth.
- ▼ Put “sticky notes” on the refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or front door.



- ▼ Place your pills in a weekly pillbox, which you can find at the pharmacy. If you take vitamins or other medications, put them in the box, too.
- ▼ Set up a “buddy system” with a friend or family member who also takes medications daily. Take turns calling each other as a reminder.
- ▼ If you have a computer or cell phone, set a reminder or sign up for a free service that will send you a daily reminder e-mail.
- ▼ Remember to refill your prescriptions. Make a note to order more medication one week before you run out.
- ▼ Ask your pharmacy if they have an automatic refill service or if they can call and remind you when refills are due.
- ▼ If you are going on a trip, count out the number of pills you'll need to make sure you have enough. Make sure you take the original labeled containers with you, in case you need to tell someone about the medications you're taking.





## Are there natural ways to control blood pressure?

Medication is not and should not be the only way of managing high blood pressure. Lifestyle changes play a big part in controlling blood pressure—especially when combined with medication. Team up with your loved one and engage in healthy activities to reduce blood pressure. Here's what you can do:

- ▼ **Enjoy a healthy diet.** Include plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, fish, lean meats and poultry. Also make sure to get plenty of potassium. Bananas, orange juice, raisins, and baked potatoes are rich in potassium.
- ▼ **Eat a low-sodium diet.** Sodium (salt) raises blood pressure by keeping fluid in the body. Look carefully at the labels of processed foods (canned soups and frozen dinners), which are often very high in sodium. If you are 51 or older, limit sodium to 1,500 milligrams a day or less.
- ▼ **Keep your weight down.** Losing even five pounds can lower blood pressure.

- ▼ **Get moving.** Being active helps control weight and contributes to better circulation. Take quick-paced walks around the neighborhood or mall to be sure you're getting at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of exercise each week.
- ▼ **Limit alcohol.** No more than one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men.
- ▼ **Don't smoke.** If you do, consider quitting.
- ▼ **Manage stress.** Learn muscle relaxation and deep-breathing skills, and get plenty of sleep.

## Remember to “team up, pressure down.”

Through medication, healthy life changes, and working closely with your health care team, you can get—and keep—your blood pressure under control. That's a message to take to heart.



## Glossary

Here are some commonly used terms that relate to high blood pressure and/or your medication.

**Atherosclerosis:** The hardening and narrowing of the arteries. This can block arteries and limit blood flow.

**Cardiovascular disease:** Refers to conditions that involve narrowed or blocked blood vessels. It can result in a heart attack, chest pain, or stroke.

**Blood pressure monitor:** A device used to measure blood pressure. It consists of an arm cuff, dial, pump, and valve.

**Diastolic blood pressure:** The pressure of blood in the blood vessels when the heart is relaxed between beats. It is the “bottom number” in a blood pressure reading. For example, if your blood pressure is 140 over 90 or 140/90, the diastolic measurement is 90.

**Heart attack:** Damage to the heart muscle from lack of blood flow for a long time.

**Heart disease:** The broad term that refers to several different types of heart conditions.

**Hypertension:** High blood pressure.

**Stroke:** Damage to brain tissue from a cutoff of the blood supply in the brain. The lack of blood can be caused by clots that block blood flow, or by bleeding in the brain from a burst blood vessel or a major injury.

**Systolic blood pressure:** The pressure of blood in the blood vessels when the heart beats or squeezes blood into the vessels. It is the “top number” in a blood pressure reading. For example, if your blood pressure is 140 over 90 or 140/90, the systolic measurement is 140.





## **Team up with a spouse or loved one to help bring your blood pressure down.**

You're working with your doctor and pharmacist to take care of your blood pressure. But there is a key third member to your health care team: your spouse or other loved one. This person can help you with the day to day support needed to help you manage your condition, medications, and lifestyle changes.

So take out this page from your journal and have an honest talk with your team member. You can discuss the kind of support you can give each other.

**Learn more how you can help at  
<http://millionhearts.hhs.gov>**



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## Team up to help keep your loved one's blood pressure down.

Your loved one needs your support to help manage his/her high blood pressure (also called hypertension). If left uncontrolled, it can lead to more serious issues including a potentially fatal heart attack or stroke. Here are some ways you can be part of the team:

- ▼ Help your loved one remember to take his/her high blood pressure medications as directed by the doctor. Work with him/her to set up a schedule or routine. This will help ensure medications are taken as prescribed and doses are not missed.
- ▼ If needed, help keep track of doctors' visits and prescription refill dates.
- ▼ Help your loved one regularly check his/her blood pressure. There are blood pressure machines in the pharmacy or grocery store that are free to customers. There are also at-home monitors for purchase that allow your loved one to keep track of their numbers between visits to the doctor or pharmacist. Help your loved one take readings at the same time each day, such as morning and evening. Encourage him/her to track the readings in the journal and speak with the pharmacist or doctor if his/her blood pressure is high. The pharmacist or doctor can recommend or make changes to his/her treatment.

- ▼ Help your loved one with important lifestyle habits such as maintaining a healthy weight. This will help lower blood pressure and reduce risk for other health problems. Get ideas for how to encourage your loved one to engage in healthy activities in upcoming sections.
- ▼ Remember that as a spouse and/or loved one, you're a key team member and source of support. Use the space below to write down any notes from your discussion with the pharmacist, or any questions you might have for them during your next visit to the pharmacy:

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## Team up with the pharmacist.

The pharmacist is also an important member of your loved one's health care team. Talk with the pharmacist—he/she is there to help. Here are some tips on getting started:

- ▼ **Meet the pharmacist.** Go with your loved one to the pharmacy when a prescription is ready. Ask to speak to the pharmacist and let him/her know how you are part of your loved one's health care team.
- ▼ **Bring a list of medications.** Write down a list or bring all past and current medications your loved one takes. This includes prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and vitamins used on a normal basis. Share this list with the pharmacist. Talk with the pharmacist about any possible side effects and to make sure the medications are safe to take with each other.
- ▼ **Ask questions.** The pharmacist is an expert on medications and how they work. Refer to page 21 of your loved one's journal for some questions to ask.

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Don't forget, you, your loved one, the doctor, and the pharmacist are all on the same team. The team that will help get—and keep—your loved one's blood pressure down.

Learn more how you can help at <http://millionhearts.hhs.gov>

