

High Blood Pressure? Don't Ignore It

In most people, high blood pressure causes no symptoms, and yet it can lead to heart attacks, strokes, and organ damage. That's why doctors call it the silent killer. If this killer lurks in your blood vessels, do something about it.

Do I have high blood pressure?

Blood pressure measurements consist of two numbers. The top number, called the systolic pressure, reflects the pressure inside your arteries when your heart is contracting. The bottom number, called the diastolic pressure, reflects the pressure inside your arteries when your heart is relaxed.

Level	Systolic	Diastolic
High	140 or above	90 or above
Prehypertension	120 to 139	80 to 89
Normal	119 or below	79 or below

See the table to see how doctors define high and normal blood pressure. "Prehypertension" is a term doctors use as a warning bell. People with prehypertension do not yet have high blood pressure, but their blood pressure is not as low as it should be for good health.

How do I lower it?

Whether you have prehypertension or all-out high blood pressure, there are things you can do to lower your blood pressure. If your doctor prescribed blood-pressure-lowering medication, you can start by taking it exactly as directed. But even if you aren't on medication, you have a lot of control over your blood pressure.

The following table lists how changes you can make might affect your systolic blood pressure.

If you...	And you...	You can lower your systolic blood pressure by...
Are overweight	Lose weight	5–20 points for every 22 pounds you lose
Eat poorly	Adopt a diet low in fat and rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products	8–14 points
Consume too much sodium	Reduce your sodium intake to less than 2.4 grams of sodium per day	2–8 points
Are inactive	Become physically active for at least 30 minutes per day on most days of the week	4–9 points
Drink alcohol	Limit yourself to 1 drink* per day if you are a woman, and 2 drinks* per day if you are a man	2–4 points

* 1 drink = 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, 1.5 ounces of 80-proof whiskey

A LifeSteps Health Coach Can Help

To learn more about high blood pressure, call a LifeSteps health coach. health coaches are specially trained healthcare professionals, such as nurses, dietitians, and respiratory therapists. They are available by phone, anytime, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at no charge to you.

To talk to a health coach, call 1-877-LIFE 123.