

According to the American Heart Association, nearly one in three U.S. adults has high blood pressure. But because high blood pressure does not have physical symptoms, many of these people go untreated and the high blood pressure is uncontrolled. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure. This is why high blood pressure is often called the "silent killer." The only way to tell if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked. If you haven't had your blood pressure checked in a while, make an appointment now.

In 90 to 95 percent of high blood pressure cases, the cause is unknown. In the remaining 5–10%, factors that may lead to high blood pressure are kidney abnormality, a structural abnormality of the aorta (large blood vessel leaving the heart) existing since birth or narrowing of certain arteries. Fortunately, these problems can usually be corrected under a physician's care.

There are many different medicines that can be used to treat high blood pressure. Your doctor may also tell you to exercise, lose weight, and follow a healthier diet.

Blood pressure is a measurement of the force applied to the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps blood through the body. The pressure is determined by the force and amount of blood pumped, and the size and flexibility of the arteries.

Blood pressure is continually changing depending on activity, temperature, diet, emotional state, posture, physical state and medication use. Blood pressure readings are measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg) and usually given as 2 numbers. For example, 110 over 70 (written as 110/70).

- The top number is the systolic blood pressure reading. It represents the maximum pressure exerted when the heart contracts.
- The bottom number is the diastolic blood pressure reading. It represents the pressure in the arteries when the heart is at rest.

In adults, the systolic pressure should be less than 120 mmHg and the diastolic pressure should be less than 80 mmHg.

Pre-high Blood Pressure:

Top number is consistently 120 to 139 or the bottom number reads 80 to 89.

Stage 1 High Blood Pressure/Hypertension:

Top number is consistently 140 to 159 or the bottom number reads 90 to 99.

Stage 2 High Blood Pressure:

Top number is consistently 160 or over or the bottom number reads 100 or over.

Low Blood Pressure/Hypotension:

Top number reading lower than 90 or pressure 25 mmHg lower than usual.

Sources:

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2114>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003398.htm>

