

TAKE CHARGE of your HEALTH



High Blood Pressure

One in three adults has high blood pressure and may not even know it, as the condition doesn't have any symptoms. This is why high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is often called the "silent killer."

But the damage it causes is certainly real. Yet, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only half of those affected do a good job of controlling it.

The average adult heart beats 100,000 times a day. So if you have high blood pressure, every beat can damage the delicate blood vessels in your body over time.

African Americans suffer from high blood pressure at a disproportionate rate compared to their Caucasian counterparts. And they typically develop it at an earlier age. The good news is that in many cases high blood pressure is preventable and treatable if you follow medical advice and make simple lifestyle changes.

There are five main classes of drugs used to lower blood pressure. Each uses a different approach and has varying degrees of success and side effects:

- Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors lower the chemical that you make in your blood stream called angiotensin II, which narrows blood vessels. It's commonly used by patients who have heart failure or diabetes, but should not be used if you have certain kidney or artery problems, or if you are pregnant.
- Angiotensin Receptor Blockers (ARB) block the effect of angiotensin II on the blood vessel walls. They have side effects similar to ACE inhibitors.
- Calcium-channel blockers affect the way calcium is used in blood vessels and heart muscle, essentially relaxing the blood vessels.
- Diuretics increase the amount of salt and fluid you pass out of your urine. This helps reduce the fluid pressure in your body.

**ONE IN THREE ADULTS HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE.
IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION, THE NUMBERS ARE: 43% FOR
MEN AND 46% FOR WOMEN.**

Therein lies the rub. Sufferers often ignore their high blood pressure or just aren't willing to commit to treatment. Some of the risk factors behind high blood pressure include obesity, lack of exercise, smoking and too much dietary salt.

A healthy diet and frequent exercise can help lower blood pressure. However, if the patient cannot lower their blood pressure on their own, medication is prescribed. Patients also undergo routine blood tests to ensure there aren't any underlying health issues, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease.

How is high blood pressure defined?

A reading below 120/80 mmHg is considered normal. Readings above 140/90 mmHg are considered high blood pressure, and anything between 120/80 mmHg and 139/89 mmHg is considered pre-hypertension.

- Beta-blockers work by slowing the heart rate and reducing the force of the heart, thus lowering blood pressure. People with asthma, chronic pulmonary disease or certain types of heart or blood vessel problems should not take beta-blockers.

A combination of drugs are often required to lower a patient's blood pressure, but treatment outcomes are usually good.

If you have a family history of high blood pressure or any of the risk factors that lead to high blood pressure, ask your physician to test your blood pressure.

Don't let the "silent killer" sneak up on you.

