

The Basics of High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is known to doctors as “Hypertension.”

Hypertension affects 1 out of every 4 Americans and is defined as a blood pressure greater than 140/90. Symptoms of hypertension include headache, vision changes, and chest pain, but most patients DO NOT HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS of high blood pressure.

The risk of hypertension increases with age because the walls of our arteries become harder. A question that most people ask is: **“Why is it important to treat high blood pressure, especially if I feel fine?”**

Hypertension is a risk factor for several diseases, including kidney failure, heart attack, heart failure, and stroke. If you also have diabetes, the risk of developing these complications is even higher, making it more important to control your blood pressure.

Treating Your Blood Pressure

What’s the Goal? Below 140/90 if you are less than 60 years old, and less than 150/90 if you are older than 60.

Take your blood pressure regularly. Take your blood pressure at least weekly and write it down so that you and your doctor can see if your treatment is working.

Diet and Exercise are the first steps to improving your blood pressure. Decreasing your salt intake and eating more fruits and vegetables is a great place to start. Eating lots of salt draws extra water into your blood stream and increases your blood pressure. The DASH diet (www.dashdiet.com) is a diet specifically for people who want help lowering the amount of salt they eat. You should also try to get 30-60 minutes of moderate activity an average of 4 days per week. Your heart will thank you!

Medication. There are a several kinds of medicine that are used to treat hypertension, when diet and exercise don’t get the job done. All of them are very affordable--some only one or two pennies a day! Your Direct Primary Care doctor will discuss the risks and benefits medication with you if you need to start them. These medications are a treatment, not a cure, so if your lifestyle modifications don’t control your blood pressure, you could be on them for life. Patients who are on blood pressure medications should have routine blood work done once a year.

What if My Blood Pressure Drops Too Much?

Being on blood pressure medicine can cause your blood pressure to occasionally get too low. There is no specific blood pressure reading that is “too low”, and instead, we go by a symptom of low blood pressure which is lightheadedness and dizziness upon standing. If you experience these symptoms – find a place to sit down and wait until you start to feel better, which should happen in a matter of seconds. If this happens every time you stand up, talk to your doctor about making some adjustments to your medications. Remember that it’s common to experience some dizziness with standing every once in a while, even if you have a normal blood pressure, but this should not happen every time you stand up, that could be a sign of over-treatment.