



## How High Blood Pressure Harms Your Body

If you're among the 1 in 3 Americans who has high blood pressure (hypertension), take note: It's not something you can afford to ignore. High blood pressure typically has no symptoms. Since symptoms can be strong motivators, it can be tough to make lifestyle changes or see the need for treatment when you feel fine. But here's why you need to follow "doctor's orders." High blood pressure is a "silent killer" - and not treating it can have serious consequences.

### What high blood pressure does to your body

Blood pressure is the force of blood that travels through your arteries. If pressure is too high, it can damage the blood vessels and organs in your body. The higher your blood pressure is, and the longer it stays untreated, the greater your risk for serious medical problems, including:

- **Heart failure.** High blood pressure puts extra demand on the heart. Over time, the heart grows bigger to make up for the extra work and it eventually weakens. Heart failure occurs when the weakened heart can't pump enough blood to meet the body's needs. High blood pressure is the biggest predictor of heart failure. One study found that 90 percent of people with heart failure had high blood pressure.
- **Heart attack.** High blood pressure can damage the arteries that carry blood and oxygen to the heart muscle. If these vessels become narrowed and damaged, a blood clot can form and lead to a heart attack.
- **Stroke.** The biggest risk factor for stroke is high blood pressure. High blood pressure can damage arteries that supply blood to the brain. A clot can form and block the artery. That can prevent blood flow to the brain, causing a stroke. High blood pressure can also cause arteries in the brain to burst. This results in another type of stroke called hemorrhagic or bleeding stroke.
- **Kidney damage.** High blood pressure can damage the arteries that supply the kidneys. This leads to kidney damage and kidney failure. This is especially dangerous because kidney damage can raise blood pressure even more.
- **Vision problems.** High blood pressure can damage the blood vessels that supply the eye. The blood vessels can burst or bleed, causing blurry vision and blindness.

### How to reduce your risk

To prevent complications, follow your high blood pressure treatment plan as directed by your doctor:

- **Take all medications as prescribed.** Never stop taking a medicine without talking to your doctor first. Blood pressure medication can cut your risk of heart failure and other complications in half.
- **Reach or maintain a healthy weight.** If you are overweight, lose weight. A weight loss of just 10 pounds can help lower blood pressure.
- **Follow the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet.** Studies show that the DASH diet helps control high blood pressure. The diet is rich in vegetables, fruit, and low-fat dairy. Foods high in saturated and total fat and cholesterol are limited. DASH also stresses the importance of potassium. Adding more potassium-rich foods to your diet can help reduce blood