

live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance and health care specialists at Cook, Hall & Hyde, Inc..

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a condition in which one's resting blood pressure is consistently measured at 140/90 or greater. Nearly one in three adults in the U.S. has high blood pressure.

Each time the heart beats, it pumps out blood into the arteries. Blood pressure is highest when the heart beats (called *systolic pressure*) and lowest when at rest (*diastolic pressure*). This is why blood pressure is always given as two numbers, such as 120/80, which is considered the normal range. Once the level reaches 140/90 or above, it is considered high blood pressure. With this condition, the heart and arteries work harder, and the chances of a stroke, heart attack or kidney problems are greater.

Causes and Risk Factors

No single specific cause has been identified in people with high blood pressure, but research is ongoing. In some people, it is the result of another medical problem or medication. When the cause is known, this is called *secondary high blood pressure*. Research has shown that the following factors put one more at risk for high blood pressure:

- Obesity
- Being African-American
- If male, being over age 45; if female, being over age 55
- A family history

- Having prehypertension (blood pressure in the 120-139/80-89 range)
- Excessive salt and/or alcohol consumption
- Not enough potassium in the diet
- Being physically inactive
- Having ongoing stress
- Smoking
- If female, taking certain oral contraceptives

Symptoms

Those with high blood pressure may have it for years without knowing, due to its lack of symptoms. The only way to find out is to have routine blood pressure checks during every visit to the doctor.

The Importance of Treatment

The first and best course of action when high blood pressure is discovered is to change eating and exercise habits. However, sometimes even when a person makes healthy changes, blood pressure remains high. In that case, a physician will most likely prescribe a blood pressure medication. If left untreated, high blood pressure can cause:

- Enlarging of the heart, which leads to heart failure

- Aneurysms in the arteries of the heart, brain, legs, intestines or spleen
- Narrowing of the blood vessels in the kidney, leading to kidney failure
- Hardening of the arteries, which can cause a heart attack, stroke, kidney failure or leg amputation
- Blood vessels bursting in the eyes

Prevention

High blood pressure can easily be prevented. Some of the best ways to avoid the condition include:

- Limiting salt, fats and alcohol
- Eating healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Being physically active
- Quitting smoking



Did you know...?

Those with high blood pressure often exhibit few or no symptoms, which is why the condition is frequently referred to as the "silent killer."