



# Blood Pressure and Your Health

## Washington Elementary School District EBT

Did you know that about one in three US adults—about 67 million people—have high blood pressure?<sup>1</sup> In addition to overworking your heart, having high blood pressure also increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. You should make it a point to visit your doctor or a local pharmacy and get your blood pressure checked—it's easy and painless!

### Am I at risk for high blood pressure?

Experts have identified several factors that can increase your risk of developing high blood pressure and thus your risk for serious health consequences. Risk factors for developing high blood pressure include:

- Lack of physical activity.
- Poor diet, especially one that includes too much salt.
- Being overweight or obese.
- Drinking too much alcohol.
- Family history.
- Advanced age.
- Gender-related risk patterns.

### What can I do about it?

Below are several ways you can manage your blood pressure:

- **Eat a better diet.** Try to prepare healthy meals low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and salt.
- **Enjoy regular physical activity.** Exercise at least 30 minutes on most or all days of the week.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Know your numbers.** You should know what your blood pressure should be and work to keep it at that level.

- **Manage stress.**
- **Comply with medication prescriptions.** Take medicine the way your healthcare provider tells you.
- **If you smoke, try to quit.**
- **If you drink, limit alcohol** to no more than one drink per day for women or two drinks a day for men.

Whether you've been diagnosed with high blood pressure or are concerned because you have some of the risk factors for the disease, it's important to understand this: while there is no cure, high blood pressure is manageable.

### Controlling high blood pressure

High blood pressure, sometimes called “the silent disease,” is a threat to everyone. High blood pressure that's not under control can increase your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

### Silent symptoms

People seldom feel any symptoms of high blood pressure—in fact, it often goes unnoticed until it's discovered during a visit to the doctor. Sometimes, people with high blood pressure may experience headaches or tiredness. However, there may be no symptoms at all, causing this dangerous condition to go undiagnosed. That's why it's very important to check your own blood pressure and keep track of your numbers.

<sup>1</sup>CDC. *Vital signs: awareness and treatment of uncontrolled hypertension among adults—United States, 2003–2010.* MMWR. 2012;61:703-9.

## How, when and where to test blood pressure

You should have your blood pressure checked two to four times a year at your doctor's visits. Between visits, test it at home using a blood pressure monitoring kit. You can buy these kits at grocery and drug stores; just ask your doctor to recommend the best one for you.

Also, many drug stores have blood pressure testing equipment for anyone to use. Be sure to write down your numbers and report them to your doctor.

## Lower your blood pressure

If you have high blood pressure, work with your doctor to learn ways you can keep it under control. Your doctor may prescribe a blood pressure medicine for you to take every day. Never skip a dose. If you feel unpleasant side effects from the drug, keep taking it, but call your doctor to discuss options and suggestions. It's important to talk to your doctor about making the following healthy changes:

- Adding physical activity to your day, or increasing your activity.
- Drinking less alcohol.
- Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Eating less salt and limiting high-sodium foods.

## If you smoke, stop!

Smoking is a very dangerous habit for someone with high blood pressure. When a person smokes, their blood vessels get smaller and tighter, and their blood pressure goes up to help pump the blood through those smaller spaces. Smokers are asking their systems to work harder and harder. Pressure builds, and the smoker's heart and brain are at greater risk for heart attack and stroke.

**For more information on high blood pressure, visit [www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure](http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure).**

*This flyer is solely for informational purposes and is not intended to provide medical advice. You should consult with your healthcare provider regarding any questions you have about your health and/or medical treatment.*

