

When Blood Pressure Stays High over Time

“When blood pressure stays high over time, it can damage the body,”¹ resulting in serious complications. A *normal* blood pressure reading is 120/80 mm Hg. If you have *prehypertension* (a blood pressure reading between 120/80 and 140/90) or *high blood pressure* (a reading of 140/90 or greater), you are at greater risk for long-term problems and serious complications, including:

- [heart failure](#),¹
- [heart attack](#),¹
- [aneurysms](#),¹
- [stroke](#),¹
- [kidney failure](#),¹
- [impaired vision](#),¹
- [blindness](#),¹ and
- [mild cognitive impairment](#).^{2,3}

“Fortunately, in most cases, high blood pressure is easy to diagnose and is usually controllable with lifestyle modifications (such as diet and exercise) and medication.”⁴

To prevent or control blood pressure...

- Have a doctor check your blood pressure at least every 2 years if you have normal blood pressure – more often if you have a prehypertension or high blood pressure reading.⁵
- Make lifestyle changes including reducing overweight; [selecting a low-fat, low-salt diet](#) (e.g., [DASH diet](#)); beginning a [regular exercise program](#); learning to manage stress; stopping smoking and tobacco use; and keeping alcohol intake in moderation.⁶

“Fortunately, in most cases, high blood pressure is easy to diagnose and is usually controllable with lifestyle modifications (such as diet and exercise) and medication.”⁴

If lifestyle factors alone do not control your blood pressure, your doctor will likely prescribe medications. Be sure to take these medications exactly as directed. If you have any negative side effects, contact your doctor right away so he/she can adjust your dosage or change medications. Do not stop taking your medication unless your doctor tells you to do so. Stopping too quickly can cause your blood pressure to go dangerously high.⁷

Finally, seek ongoing medical care:

- Go for medical checkups or tests as your doctor advises.
- [Keep track of your blood pressure](#). Have your blood pressure checked on the schedule your doctor advises.
- During checkups, ask your doctor or health care team any [questions](#) you have about your lifestyle or medicine treatments.⁸

In these ways, you can prevent the long-term problems associated with high blood pressure.

Sources

1. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2008). What are the signs and symptoms of high blood pressure [on-line]. Retrieved April 23, 2008. From http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hbp/HBP_SignsAndSymptoms.html.
2. Reitz, C., Tang, M., Manly, J., Mayeux, R., and Luchsinger, J.A. Hypertension and the risk of mild cognitive impairment. *Arch Neurol*. 2007; 64(12):1734-1740. From: <http://archneur.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/64/12/1734>.
3. Thomson Reuters (2007). High blood pressure ups risk for mental decline [on-line]. Retrieved May 7, 2008. From <http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSWRI08485520071210>.
4. Johns Hopkins Medicine (2008). Hypertension (high blood pressure) and stroke [on-line]. Retrieved April 23, 2008. From http://www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com/alerts_index/hypertension_stroke/21-1.html.
5. American Heart Association (2008). How do I know if I have high blood pressure? [on-line]. Retrieved April 23, 2008. From <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=219>.
6. Texas Heart Institute (2007). High blood pressure (hypertension) [on-line]. Retrieved April 24, 2008. From <http://www.texasheartinstitute.org/HIC/Topics/Cond/hbp.cfm>.
7. Merck Source (2001). High blood pressure and stroke [on-line]. Retrieved April 23, 2008. From http://www.mercksource.com/pp/us/cns/cns_krames_template.jspzQzpgzEzzSzppdocszSzuszSzcnyszSzcontentzSzkrameszSz1839_01zPzhtm.
8. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2008). Living with high blood pressure [on-line]. Retrieved April 23, 2008. From http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hbp/HBP_LivingWith.html.