

# UPDATE

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## High Blood Pressure

### **What is high blood pressure?**

Imagine that your arteries are pipes that carry blood from your heart to the rest of your body. High blood pressure (also called hypertension) occurs when your blood moves through your arteries at a higher pressure than normal.

### **What do the numbers mean?**

Blood pressure is really two measurements, separated by a slash when written down, such as 120/80. You may also hear someone say a blood pressure is "120 over 80."

The first number is the systolic blood pressure. This is the peak blood pressure when your heart is squeezing blood out. The second number is the diastolic blood pressure. It's the pressure when your heart is filling with blood relaxing between beats.

A normal blood pressure is 120/80 or lower. High blood pressure is 140/90 or higher. If your blood pressure is between 120/80 and 140/90, you have something called "prehypertension."

### **How is high blood pressure diagnosed?**

Blood pressure is measured by putting a blood pressure cuff around your arm, inflating the cuff and listening for the flow of blood. Your doctor will measure your blood pressure at more than one visit to see if you have high blood pressure.

### **What problems does high blood pressure cause?**

High blood pressure damages your blood vessels. This in turn raises your risk of stroke, kidney failure, heart disease and heart attack.

### **How do tobacco products affect blood pressure?**

The nicotine in cigarettes and other tobacco products causes your blood vessels to constrict and your heart to beat faster, which temporarily raises your blood pressure. If you quit smoking or using other tobacco products, you can significantly lower your risk of heart disease and heart attack, as well as help lower your blood pressure.

