



WELLNESS BULLETIN

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

California Department of Developmental Services

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Is this bulletin useful?

High blood pressure is a common medical condition. When someone has high blood pressure it increases their chance of having a heart attack, stroke, or other serious health problems. It is important to know if you have high blood pressure, how to prevent it, and how to treat it.

What is High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the amount of pressure that it takes to pump blood through your body. High blood pressure means your heart is working harder to pump your blood.

How to Check Your Blood Pressure

When you get your blood pressure checked, a healthcare professional puts a blood pressure cuff around your arm. The cuff gets tight around your arm and then slowly loosens. When the cuff loosens, two numbers appear on the machine's screen. These numbers are your blood pressure.

Source: [High Blood Pressure and Older Adults](#) | [National Institute on Aging](#) ([nih.gov](#))



Wellness and Safety Bulletins are produced by the Department of Developmental Services to alert individuals, families, and others about specific risks to our community. Please provide feedback on this bulletin and what we can do better through this survey: [Bulletin Survey](#)

Know if Your Blood Pressure is High

Each person's ideal blood pressure numbers are based on their age and any medical conditions they might have. Talk to your doctor to see what your ideal or target blood pressure numbers should be.

Checking Your Blood Pressure

How often you have your blood pressure checked depends on your age and health. It is a good idea to have your blood pressure checked:

- At least every two years if you are 18 to 39 years old

- Every year if you are 40 years old or if you are at risk of having high blood pressure

Some drug stores and pharmacies have free blood pressure screenings and automatic blood pressure cuffs that you can buy and use at home.

Source: [High blood pressure \(hypertension\) - Symptoms & causes | Mayo Clinic \(mayoclinic.org\)](#)

Some Factors That Can Affect Your Blood Pressure Reading



Getting nervous or anxious about having your blood pressure taken might affect your reading.



If you smoked, drank alcohol or caffeine, or exercised within 30 minutes of having your blood pressure measured, your reading might be higher.



Crossing your legs and letting your arm hang at your side, rather than rest on a table at chest height can make your blood pressure reading go up.

Risk Factors for High Blood Pressure

There are many factors that raise your risk for high blood pressure.

Age – the risk of high blood pressure increases as you get older

Obesity or being overweight – excess weight can increase blood pressure

Lack of exercise – not exercising can lead to weight gain and inactive people have higher heart rates

Smoking – blood pressure temporarily increases each time someone smokes

Race – high blood pressure is more common among people who are black

Family history – if your parent, brother, or sister has high blood pressure

Too much salt – a lot of salt can cause the body to hold onto fluids which increases blood pressure

Unhealthy diet – diets that are too high in salt (or sodium) and low in potassium increase the risk for high blood pressure

Stress – high levels of stress can lead to temporary high blood pressure

Source: [High blood pressure \(hypertension\) - Symptoms & causes | Mayo Clinic \(mayoclinic.org\)](#); [Hypertension \(who.int\)](#); [Hypertensive crisis: What are the symptoms? - Mayo Clinic \(mayoclinic.org\)](#)

Symptoms of High Blood Pressure

You can have high blood pressure for years without showing symptoms. Most people with high blood pressure have no symptoms, even if their blood pressure is at very high levels.



Symptoms of high blood pressure can include:

- Headaches
- Shortness of breath
- Nosebleeds
- Blood spots in the eyes
- Facial flushing
- Sudden dizziness
- Loss of balance or coordination

These symptoms are common with many other conditions. Having these symptoms does not mean they are caused by high blood pressure.

Source: [High blood pressure \(hypertension\) - Symptoms & causes | Mayo Clinic \(mayoclinic.org\)](#); [What are the Symptoms of High Blood Pressure? | American Heart Association \(heart.org\)](#)

Ways to Control High Blood Pressure

Lose some weight if you are overweight

Get regular exercise or be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day

Read more about how to maintain a [healthy lifestyle](#)

Eat a healthy diet, including whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, and foods low in fat, saturated fats, and salt

Eat fewer prepackaged foods

Add little to no salt to food you are cooking

Read more about a [healthy diet](#)

Practice good sleeping habits

Read more about [improving sleep](#)

Try to lower your stress

Avoid things that make you stressed

Make time each day to relax

Make time for doing things you enjoy, like hobbies or time with friends or family

Practice deep breathing

Drink less alcohol

Quit smoking

If you have high blood pressure, regularly check and keep track of your blood pressure

Take any medication that your physician prescribes to help control your blood pressure

Source: [10 ways to control high blood pressure without medication](#) | [Mayo Clinic \(mayoclinic.org\)](#)



Additional Resources



[My Blood Pressure Log \(cdc.gov\)](#)



[My First Blood Pressure Visit \(cdc.gov\)](#)



[Managing My Blood Pressure \(cdc.gov\)](#)



[High Blood Pressure \(cdc.gov\)](#)