



# WELLNESS BULLETIN

## HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

California Department of Developmental Services

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Is this bulletin useful?

## What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the amount of pressure that it takes to pump blood through the body and the amount of pressure between heart beats. Hypertension (high blood pressure) occurs when the heart needs to work harder to pump blood, increasing pressure on the arteries.

120 ← Systolic

80 ← Diastolic

A blood pressure measurement has two numbers:

The top number (systolic) is the pressure of the blood when the heart muscle squeezes to pump blood.

The bottom number (diastolic) is the pressure in the arteries measured between heartbeats.

Each person's ideal blood pressure is different and is based on their age and any underlying medical conditions. It is something that should be discussed with their primary care physician.

Source: [High Blood Pressure and Older Adults | National Institute on Aging \(nih.gov\)](#); [Why establishing a health baseline is a 'critical starting point for achieving future health goals' - Scope \(stanford.edu\)](#); [Blood Pressure Measurement - Cleveland Clinic \(my.clevelandclinic.org\)](#)

High blood pressure is when the pressure of the blood pushing through the body is consistently too high. It makes the heart work harder to pump blood. High blood pressure increases the risk of heart attack, stroke, and other serious health problems.

The higher the blood pressure and the longer it goes uncontrolled, the greater the following risks:



Heart attack or stroke  
Aneurysm  
Heart failure  
Kidney problems

Eye problems  
Changes with memory or understanding  
Dementia

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



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

## Symptoms

Most people with high blood pressure do not have any symptoms. A person can have high blood pressure for years without showing symptoms. That is why it is important that the people you support have their blood pressure checked occasionally. Symptoms may include:



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

These symptoms are associated with many other health conditions and are not specific to high blood pressure. They usually do not occur until high blood pressure has reached a severe or life-threatening stage.

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

## Check and Maintain Blood Pressure

It is important to have the blood pressure of the people you support checked:

- At least every two years for individuals aged 18 to 39
- At least annually for individuals 40 years of age or older or at risk of high blood pressure
- Free blood pressure screening and automatic blood pressure cuffs for home use are available at some drug stores and pharmacies.

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

## Taking Blood Pressure Properly

- Before taking the blood pressure of an individual that you support, invite them to sit quietly in a chair for five minutes or so to relax.
- For the reading, have the individual sit upright in the chair with their back supported and both feet on the floor.
- Support their arm at heart level, resting it on a countertop or table.
- Place the cuff over bare skin, not over a sleeve.
- If the blood pressure reading is very high and the individual is not having any symptoms, have the individual relax for a few minutes and then check the blood pressure again.

Source: [Hypertension \(who.int\)](#); [High Blood Pressure | CDC \(cdc.gov\)](#); [Hypertensive crisis: What are the symptoms? - Mayo Clinic \(mayoclinic.org\)](#)

# Risk Factors

There are many factors that put individuals at risk for high blood pressure.



## Age

The risk of high blood pressure increases with age.



## Family history

A person is more likely to develop high blood pressure if their parent or sibling has the condition.



## Obesity or being overweight

Excess weight causes changes in blood vessels and throughout the body that can increase blood pressure.



## Smoking

Blood pressure temporarily increases each time someone smokes.



## Lack of exercise

Not exercising can lead to weight gain and inactive people tend to have higher heart rates.



## Unhealthy diet

Diets that are too high in salt (or sodium) and low in potassium cause the body to retain fluid which increases blood pressure.



## Race

High blood pressure is particularly common among people who are black.



## Stress

High levels of stress can lead to a temporary increase in blood pressure.

Source: [High blood pressure \(hypertension\) - Symptoms & causes | Mayo Clinic \(mayoclinic.org\)](#); [Hypertension \(who.int\)](#); [High Blood Pressure | CDC \(cdc.gov\)](#)

# What Affects a Blood Pressure Reading?



Some factors can affect a blood pressure reading:

**Nervousness about having blood pressure taken** – This is called “white coat syndrome.” As many as 1 in 3 people who have a high blood pressure reading at the doctor’s office may have a normal blood pressure readings outside of that office.

**What someone ate, drank, or did before the reading** – Someone’s blood pressure reading might be higher if they smoked, drank alcohol or caffeine, or exercised within 30 minutes of having their blood pressure measured.

**How someone is sitting** – When someone crosses their legs and lets their arm hang at their side, rather than resting their arm on a table at chest height, their blood pressure can go up.

Source: [Measure Your Blood Pressure | CDC \(cdc.gov\)](#)

# Ways to Control High Blood Pressure

If the person you support is overweight or obese, encourage them to lose extra weight.

Encourage regular exercise, with the goal of at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day.

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

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

- Serve fewer processed foods
- Do not add salt to food you are cooking
- Read more about a [healthy diet](#)

Encourage good sleeping habits.

Read more about [improving sleep](#)

Lower stress.

- Support avoiding stress triggers
- Encourage finding time to relax
- Make time for enjoyable activities or hobbies
- Practice deep breathing

Encourage drinking less alcohol.

Support the individual to quit smoking.

If the individual has been diagnosed with high blood pressure, assist them to track their blood pressure.

In some cases, the individual's physician may prescribe medication to help control their blood pressure.



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

## Additional Resources

-  [Managing My Blood Pressure \(PDF\)](#)
-  [My Blood Pressure Log \(PDF\)](#)
-  [My First Blood Pressure Visit \(PDF\)](#)
-  [High Blood Pressure Facts \(cdc.gov\)](#)