

# Understanding High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)



## What Is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels as it moves from your heart to other parts of your body. Your blood pressure normally rises and falls. But if it stays high for a long time, it can cause serious health problems such as heart attacks, strokes and kidney disease.

## How Are You Diagnosed With High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure (hypertension) is a health condition that often doesn't have any signs or symptoms. To know if you have high blood pressure, your doctor will look at your blood pressure measurements over time. It usually takes a few visits and different measurements to confirm you have a diagnosis of high blood pressure.

## How Is Blood Pressure Measured?

Your blood pressure is measured by two numbers in units called millimeters of mercury (mmHg). For example, a blood pressure number would be written 118/78 mmHg. Here is what the numbers represent:

**118**      **Top number (systolic)**—the pressure when the heart beats  
**78**      **Bottom number (diastolic)**—the pressure between heart beats

## Blood Pressure Categories

There are different categories of blood pressure diagnosis, from normal to an emergency. What category you're in depends on your regular blood pressure measurements in your doctor's office

Category	Systolic (Top) mmHg		Diastolic (Bottom) mmHg
<b>Normal</b>	Lower than 120	and	Lower than 80
<b>Elevated</b>	120-129	and	Lower than 80
<b>High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1</b>	130-139	or	80-89
<b>High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2</b>	140 or higher	or	90 or higher
<b>Hypertension Crisis or Emergency</b>	Higher than 180	and/ or	Higher than 120

If your blood pressure is in this range, call your healthcare team.



## Sutter Resources

- Talk to your healthcare team about high blood pressure. Together, you can create a personal treatment plan for you.
- Go to [sutterhealth.org](http://sutterhealth.org) to learn more about high blood pressure. Find local resources by going to [sutterhealth.org/classes-events](http://sutterhealth.org/classes-events) and selecting topics such as: Fitness, Heart Health, Mental Health, Nutrition, Sleep or Weight Management.

## Quick Tip

No matter your age, you can take steps each day to manage your blood pressure. Make healthy lifestyle choices and manage any health conditions you have.

## Treatment for High Blood Pressure

If you have a diagnosis of high blood pressure (hypertension), it's important to work closely with your healthcare team. Together, you will create a personal treatment plan for you.

### Lifestyle Changes

If you have a diagnosis of elevated or high blood pressure, your healthcare team will recommend lifestyle changes to lower your numbers.

- Eat more vegetables, fruit and whole grains. Cut back on saturated fats, processed foods and salt.
- Move your body more. Sit less.
- Lose weight if you are overweight—even a small amount can help.
- Drink less alcohol.
- Quit cigarettes and other tobacco products.
- Try ways to lower your stress and improve your sleep.

### Monitoring Your Blood Pressure at Home

If you have a diagnosis of elevated or high blood pressure, your healthcare team may ask you to monitor your blood pressure at home. This will help manage your blood pressure. To know if you're checking your blood pressure correctly, ask your healthcare team for support and instruction.

### Medication

If you have a diagnosis of high blood pressure, your healthcare team may recommend medication. If you're prescribed medication, it's important to keep taking it even if you feel fine. If you have concerns about your medication, talk to your healthcare team. You may be able to reduce or stop your medication if you are able to lower your blood pressure through lifestyle changes.

### Additional Resources

[heart.org](http://heart.org)

The American Heart Association offers credible information on high blood pressure and tips for heart health.

## Know When to Call for Help

People with high blood pressure are at a higher risk for heart attack and stroke. It's important to know the symptoms of these two emergencies.

### Think you are having a heart attack? Call 911!

Do you have the following symptoms?

- Chest pressure or pain.
- Jaw discomfort.
- Arm or hand numbness or tingling.
- Shortness of breath.
- Nausea that does not go away within 10 minutes of rest.
- Sweating.

### Think you are having a stroke? Call 911!

B.E.F.A.S.T. is an easy way to remember the signs of stroke:

**B** **Balance**—Is there a sudden loss of balance or coordination? When walking, are you leaning to one side or staggering?

**E** **Eyes and vision**—Is there a sudden change or loss of vision in one or both eyes? Do you have double vision? When looking straight ahead, are you unable to see anything to the side or above your field of vision?

**F** **Face drooping**—Does one side of your face droop? Is it numb? Try to smile. Is the smile uneven?

**A** **Arm weakness**—Is one arm weak or numb? Try to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

**S** **Speech difficulty**—Is speech slurred? Are you unable to speak? Are you hard to understand? Repeat a simple sentence like “The sky is blue.” Is the sentence repeated correctly?

**T** **Time to call 911**—If you show any of these symptoms, call 911 and get to the hospital immediately. Check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared.