



High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)



Overview

When your heart beats, it pushes blood through your arteries. This creates pressure against the artery walls. If this pressure is too high, you have high blood pressure. It's a common disease. But if you don't manage it properly, it can cause health problems.

Understanding Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is measured with two numbers written like a fraction. The top number is the pressure in your arteries when your heart is pushing out blood. The bottom number is the pressure between beats, when your heart is resting. The higher the pressure, the greater your risk for health problems. Normal blood pressure is considered to be less than 120 over less than 80. Elevated blood pressure is 120 to 129 over less than 80. Stage 1 high blood pressure is when the top number is 130 to 139 or the bottom number is 80 to 89. Stage 2 high blood pressure is when the top number is at least 140 or the bottom number is at least 90. If the top number is over 180 and/or the bottom number is over 120, it's called "hypertensive crisis." You need to make immediate changes in your lifestyle.

Causes

We don't completely understand the causes of high blood pressure. For many people, it develops slowly over time and it may not have an obvious cause. But in some cases its causes are known. It can develop because of problems with your kidneys, adrenal glands or thyroid. It can be linked to problems with your artery walls. It can be caused by certain medications, and by alcohol and drug abuse.

Risk Factors

You have a higher risk for this disease if you are overweight. Your risk is higher if you eat a diet high in salt, if you drink a lot of alcohol or if you don't exercise enough. Your risk gets higher as you get older. This disease is more common in men, and in black people. And, you have a higher risk if you have a family history of this disease.



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Symptoms and Complications

You can have high blood pressure for a long time and not realize it. For most people it doesn't cause any obvious symptoms until it becomes severe. If your high blood pressure is not managed properly, it can lead to severe complications. It can cause heart attack, stroke, aneurysm, kidney problems and vision loss.

Treatment

Treatment options may include a healthier lifestyle and medications. Your healthcare provider can create a care plan that is right for you.