

What You Should Know About... Hypertension Awareness and Risk Factors

High blood pressure, a medical condition known as *hypertension*, affects millions of people in the United States. It is often referred to as the “silent killer” because it usually has no symptoms. Read on to learn more about hypertension awareness and risk factors—and healthy lifestyle changes that may help to control and manage hypertension.

Statistics from a large survey of United States adults showed that between 2003 and 2010:^a

About 66.9 million US adults, or 30.4% of the US population, had *hypertension*, which was defined as blood pressure at or above 140/90 mm Hg, or use of a blood pressure-lowering medication.

About 35.8 million US adults, or 53.5% of those with hypertension, did not have their hypertension under control.

Among adults who did not have their hypertension under control:

- About 16 million people knew they had hypertension and were taking medication to treat it
- About 5.7 million people were not taking medication for their hypertension even though they knew they had hypertension
- About 14.1 million people did not know they had hypertension

Why are these numbers important?

Over one-fourth of US adults surveyed had hypertension, and more than half of US adults with hypertension did not have it under control. Controlling and treating hypertension is important. If left uncontrolled, hypertension can increase the risk for developing *cardiovascular disease* (including heart attack, stroke, or heart failure) and/or kidney disease.

Many people with hypertension did not know they had it. Therefore, it's important to be aware of some of the risk factors for hypertension, which include:

- ▶ High levels of stress or anxiety
- ▶ Family history or personal history of diabetes or high blood pressure
- ▶ Being overweight or obese
- ▶ Smoking
- ▶ Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
- ▶ Eating large amounts of salt
- ▶ African-American ethnicity

How can hypertension be controlled and managed?

The good news is that hypertension can be managed—and even prevented—with a healthy lifestyle. Here are a few ways to keep your blood pressure in check:

- ▶ Eat less salt!
- ▶ Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet: increase intake of fruits, vegetables, potassium, and fiber
- ▶ Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight
- ▶ Manage your stress level: do something that helps you to relax when you feel stressed, such as calling a friend or family member or enjoying a favorite hobby
- ▶ Stop smoking
- ▶ Limit alcohol intake: no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men

Remember: Be sure to discuss these tips with your healthcare provider: he or she will work with you to create a treatment plan, which may also include prescription medications.

^aCenters for Disease Control and Prevention. Vital signs: awareness and treatment of uncontrolled hypertension among adults—United States, 2003–2010. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2012; 61(35):703–709.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

The blood pressure reading that your healthcare provider will give you is based on two numbers:

- ▶ The first number is your *systolic* blood pressure, which measures the pressure in your arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood away from your heart) when your heart beats.
- ▶ The second number measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart is resting between beats, and is known as *diastolic* blood pressure.

Normal blood pressure is less than 120 systolic and 80 diastolic, which is shown as 120/80 mm Hg (mm Hg is the abbreviation for “millimeters of mercury”, which is how blood pressure is measured).

Hypertension is blood pressure that is at or above 140/90 mm Hg most of the time.

REFERENCES American Heart Association. Prevention and treatment of high blood pressure; Why blood pressure matters; Understanding blood pressure readings. All available at: <http://www.heart.org>; PubMed Health. Hypertension. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001502/>. All websites accessed October 5, 2012.



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