

HYPERTENSION AND HEART DISEASE

What High Blood Pressure Does To Your Heart

You may already know that high blood pressure (**hypertension**) is one of the leading risk factors for heart attack and stroke, but do you know why? The heart and blood vessels together form the cardiovascular system, and a defect in either one is bound to affect the other. The following information can help you learn about what blood pressure is and how high blood pressure can affect your cardiovascular health.

Understanding Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels. When you have your blood pressure checked, you'll notice that the measurement is given as two separate numbers, 110/70 for instance. The top number refers to the pressure in your arteries when your heart is pumping (**systolic pressure**). The lower number refers to the pressure in your arteries when the heart is resting (**diastolic**). Blood pressure changes throughout the day depending on your activity, stress level, and other factors. High blood pressure is usually defined as blood pressure greater than 140/90 that fails to come down regardless of your activity.

A Problem Without Symptoms

High blood pressure has virtually

Regular blood pressure checks are important for everyone since high blood pressure often has no noticeable symptoms.




no noticeable side effects in its early stage. That is why everyone should have their blood pressure checked annually (if the results are normal), or every few months (if the results are borderline or high). Sadly, all too often the first "sign" of hypertension is a heart attack, stroke, or kidney problem.

Effects On The Heart

When blood pressure is too high and remains that way, arterial walls become weakened and more prone to **atherosclerosis** (a build-up of fatty substances on the inner walls of the arteries). The heart must then work harder to try to pump oxygenated blood through the clogged arteries. The clogged arteries are also more prone to

blood clots that can block the flow of blood entirely. Excess blood pressure can also cause arteries to bulge (**aneurysm**) or burst (**hemorrhage**).

Controlling Your Blood Pressure

The first step in blood pressure control is regular blood pressure checks. If you are diagnosed as having high blood pressure, follow your doctor's instructions faithfully. Your treatment plan may include exercise and diet recommendations as well as medications to lower blood pressure if needed. We still don't know how to prevent high blood pressure. We can, fortunately, learn how to control it. 

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