

High Blood Pressure

What is High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of the arteries when the heart beats (systolic pressure) and when the heart is at rest (diastolic pressure). When blood pressure stays elevated over time, it's called high blood pressure. High blood pressure ([hypertension](#)) is defined in an adult as a blood pressure greater than or equal to 140 mm Hg systolic pressure or greater than or equal to 90 mm Hg diastolic pressure.

High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes the heart work too hard. High blood pressure directly increases the risk of coronary heart disease (which leads to heart attack) and stroke, especially when it's present with other risk factors.

While B/P can change from minute to minute with changes in posture, exercise, stress, or sleep. However, if readings stay at 140/90 or higher, over time you may need to begin a treatment program. Even if you blood pressure is normal, you should consider making lifestyle modifications to prevent the development of high blood pressure and improve your heart health.

High blood pressure can occur in children or adults, but it's more common among people over age 35. It's particularly prevalent in African Americans, middle-aged and elderly people, obese people, heavy drinkers and women taking birth control pills. It may run in families, but many people with a strong family history of high blood pressure never have it. People with diabetes mellitus, gout or kidney disease are more likely to have high blood pressure too.

American Heart Association recommended blood pressure levels

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic (mm Hg)		Diastolic (mm Hg)
Normal	less than 120	and	less than 80
Prehypertension	120-139	or	80-89
High Blood Pressure			
Stage 1	140-159	or	90-99
Stage 2	160 or higher	or	100 or higher

High Blood Pressure

What are some lifestyle changes to lower blood pressure?

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Do physical activity for 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Eat a diet high in fresh fruits and low-fat dairy products with reduced saturated and total fat.
- Choose foods that are lower in salt and other forms of sodium. Read food labels.
- If you drink alcohol, have no more than one drink a day for women, two drinks a day for men.
- Have your blood pressure checked at least once or twice a year – this can be done at Health Services, just call for an appointment.

Sources and/or additional resources:

American Heart Association: www.americanheart.org

If you are a registered Millersville University student and you have questions or you need to make an appointment, please call Millersville University Health Services at 871-5250.