



High Blood Pressure Myths and Facts

High blood pressure puts you at risk for heart disease, stroke, and other serious health conditions

Know Your Numbers

Blood pressure is measured using two numbers. The first – called the systolic number – measures the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats. The second – the diastolic number – measures the pressure in your vessels when your heart rests between beats. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg). If your reading is 120 systolic and 80 diastolic, you would say “120 over 80” or write “120/80 mmHg.” Keep these numbers in mind the next time you get your blood pressure checked.

BP Levels	Systolic	Diastolic
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
At Risk	120-139	80-89
High	140 or higher	90 or higher

About one in three U.S. adults has high blood pressure. That’s an estimated 68 million people. This condition – also called hypertension – affects people of all ages and backgrounds. Because it can lead to life-threatening problems, it’s critical to know just how serious high blood pressure is. Read on to separate facts from fiction.

Myth: High blood pressure isn’t really dangerous.

Fact: High blood pressure increases risk of heart attack and stroke, and can lead to congestive heart failure, kidney damage, dementia and blindness. It can permanently damage your heart, brain, eyes and kidneys before you feel anything. Keeping your blood pressure in the healthy range can:

- Reduce the risk of your blood vessel walls becoming overstretched and injured.
- Reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke, and of developing heart failure and kidney failure.
- Protect your entire body by assuring your tissue receives regular supplies of the oxygen-rich blood it needs.

Myth: I’ll be able to tell if something is wrong.

Fact: High blood pressure is often called “the silent killer” because usually there are no symptoms. Yet it is easy to detect with a simple test. The American Heart Association recommends adults have their blood pressure checked every two years at regular doctor visits.

Myth: When you get high blood pressure, you can just take medicine and be done with it.

Fact: Prevention is a smarter approach. Follow these tips to help maintain a healthy blood pressure.

- Watch your weight and eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Limit alcohol.
- Don’t smoke.
- Monitor your salt and sodium intake.
- Manage stress.

Once you know you have high blood pressure, you can work with your doctor to control it. Sometimes that means taking medications. Some people lower their blood pressure by making lifestyle changes like those listed above. Others do both.

Myth: Stress is only a worry if it’s long term.

Fact: Stress has not been proven to cause chronic high blood pressure. Still, even short bouts of stress can increase your heart rate and raise blood pressure. While stress does not clearly cause heart disease, managing stress can play a role in general wellness. Look for ways to reduce stress in your life. Helpful strategies include daily relaxation techniques such as yoga, and learning to deal with stress on the spot, such as deep breathing or taking a quick walk. Healthy habits like these can help protect your heart from the harmful effects of stress.