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High Blood Pressure in Adults

High blood pressure overview:

Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure. Blood pressure refers to the pressure that blood applies to the inner walls of the arteries. Arteries carry blood from the heart to other organs and parts of the body.

What is blood pressure?

An individual's blood pressure is defined by two measurements:

- Systolic pressure is the pressure in the arteries produced when the heart contracts (at the time of a heart beat)
- Diastolic pressure refers the pressure in the arteries during relaxation of the heart between heart beats

Blood pressure is reported as the systolic pressure over diastolic pressure (120/70 or "120 over 70").

Untreated high blood pressure increases the strain on the heart and arteries, eventually causing organ damage. High blood pressure increases the risk of heart failure, heart attack (myocardial infarction), stroke, and kidney failure.

High blood pressure definition:

The following definitions were proposed in 2017 by the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association (ACC/AHA); other expert groups may differ slightly in how they define hypertension and when they recommend treatment.

- **Normal blood pressure:** Less than 120 over less than 80
- **Elevated blood pressure:** 120 to 129 over less than 80
 - People with elevated blood pressure are at increased risk of developing hypertension and cardiovascular complications; however, medications used to treat hypertension are not known to be beneficial in people with elevated blood pressure.
- **Stage 1 Hypertension:** 130 to 139 over 80 to 89
- **Stage 2 Hypertension:** At least 140 over at least 90

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Most adults with hypertension have primary hypertension (formerly called "essential" hypertension), which means that the cause of the high blood pressure is not known. A small subset of adults has secondary hypertension, which means that there is an underlying and potentially correctable cause, usually a kidney or hormonal disorder.

Prevalence of high blood pressure:

Hypertension is a common health problem. In the United States, approximately 46 percent of adults have hypertension.

Hypertension is more common as people grow older. In the United States, for example, hypertension is present in 76 percent of adults aged 65 to 74 years and 82 percent of adults aged 75 years or older.

Unfortunately, many people's blood pressure is not well controlled. According to a national survey, hypertension was in good control in only 47 percent of adults.

High blood pressure symptoms:

High blood pressure does not usually cause any symptoms.

High blood pressure diagnosis:

Many people are anxious when seeing a doctor or nurse. As a result, you are not diagnosed with hypertension unless your blood pressure is persistently high at two office visits at least one week apart.

The only exceptions to this are if the blood pressure is very high or if you have damage from high blood pressure, such as heart, eye, or kidney injury. Before a decision is made to begin treatment, you may be asked to measure your blood pressure at home or work.

High blood pressure treatment:

Untreated hypertension can lead to a variety of complications, including heart disease and stroke. The risk of these complications increases as your blood pressure rises above 110/75, which is still in the healthy range. Treating high blood pressure can reduce your risk of heart attack, stroke, and death.

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Lifestyle changes: Treatment of hypertension usually begins with lifestyle changes. Making these lifestyle changes involves little or no risk. Recommended changes often include:

- Reduce the amount of salt in your diet
- Lose weight if you are overweight or obese
- Avoid drinking too much alcohol
- Stop smoking
- Exercise at least 30 minutes per day most days of the week

Medicine: A medicine to lower blood pressure may be recommended if your blood pressure is consistently high, usually at or above 140/90. Treatment with medicine is recommended at a lower blood pressure for some older people and for those with atherosclerosis (fatty deposits lining the arteries, as in coronary heart disease, stroke, or peripheral artery disease), diabetes, or chronic kidney disease complicated by protein in the urine.