

Hypertension in the United States: Could You Be At Risk?

Nearly 50 million Americans have high blood pressure, with nearly two million people newly diagnosed each year! While there's no single cause of high blood pressure, major risk factors include smoking, high cholesterol and triglycerides, diabetes, age over 60, gender (men and postmenopausal women), and family history of heart disease.

Genetics, stress, obesity, and alcohol abuse are also major contributors to hypertension. In fact, high blood pressure is considered *multifactorial* in nature – in other words, persons with hypertension generally have *two or more* risk factors.

Hypertension itself is a major risk factor for several chronic diseases, frequently related to the progression of heart diseases, stroke, kidney disease, and other serious illnesses. Because high blood pressure can cause such negative effects and lead to more serious chronic diseases – including our #1 killer in the United States, heart disease – early treatment is essential.

Blood pressure measures the two points of most and least pressure in the arteries resulting from the heart contracting: systolic and diastolic pressure. In measuring blood pressure, systolic pressure is the first number and diastolic pressure is the second number in the blood pressure fraction.

The table below shows the ranges of optimal, normal, high-normal, and the three stages of hypertension. Each level above the optimal range increases the risk of disease.

	Systolic	Diastolic
Optimal	<120	<80
Normal	120-129	80-84
High-Normal	130-139	85-89
Hypertension		
Stage 1 (Mild)	140-159	90-99
Stage 2 (Moderate)	160-179	100-109
Stage 3 (Severe)	≥180	≥110

Lifestyle changes including a healthy diet, exercise, weight reduction, and stress management are very important in the treatment high blood pressure. For some individuals, medications are also necessary – in addition to these diet and lifestyle changes.

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