



TAKE IT TO HEART.

Get your blood pressure checked.

Your blood pressure is a measure of the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. It becomes higher with the more blood your heart pumps and when your arteries narrow. This raises your risk of serious problems like heart disease, stroke, eye problems and kidney disease.¹ You might not know you have high blood pressure (also called hypertension) unless you get it checked.

What increases your risk?

Many factors can add to your risk of high blood pressure. These may include:²

- › **Obesity and being overweight**
- › **Lack of exercise** – People who are inactive tend to have higher heart rates, which means your heart works harder, increasing the force on your arteries.
- › **Race** – High blood pressure is more common among African Americans.
- › **Age** – Risk increases with age.
- › **Using tobacco** – Not only does it raise your blood pressure temporarily, the chemicals in tobacco can damage the lining of your artery walls, causing them to narrow.
- › **Other conditions** – Including pregnancy, sleep apnea, kidney disease and diabetes.
- › **Family history** – If a close relative has been diagnosed with high blood pressure, your risk is greater.
- › **Diet high in sodium (salt).**
- › **Diet low in potassium** – Not eating enough potassium-rich fruits and vegetables is a risk factor.
- › **Drinking too much alcohol** – Over time, heavy drinking can damage your heart.
- › **Stress** – High levels of stress can temporarily increase your blood pressure.

How blood pressure is measured.

Blood pressure is typically measured by a health care professional inflating a cuff around your arm and using a stethoscope to listen to the blood traveling through your arteries. There are also home monitoring devices that you can use yourself.

Two numbers are used to represent your blood pressure. The first number (systolic) measures the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats. The second number (diastolic) measures the pressure when your heart is at rest.



Symptoms to watch for.¹

High blood pressure does not usually cause symptoms until serious complications occur. Contact a health care provider immediately if you experience:

- › Severe headache
- › Fatigue or confusion
- › Sudden changes in vision
- › Chest pain
- › Difficulty breathing
- › Pounding in chest, neck or ears
- › Irregular heartbeat

Together, all the way.®



How high is too high?

Your health care provider may diagnose high blood pressure based on your blood pressure measurements over time. They will also monitor any unusually low pressure readings.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120 – 129	and	Less than 80
High blood pressure (hypertension) Stage 1	130 – 139	or	80 – 89
High blood pressure (hypertension) Stage 2	140 or higher	or	90 or higher

Hypertensive crisis.

If your blood pressure readings suddenly exceed 180/120 mm Hg, wait five minutes and then test your blood pressure again. If your readings are still unusually high, contact your doctor immediately.³



Choose a healthy eating plan.

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet encourages you to eat fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, fish, poultry and whole grains – while limiting unhealthy fats.

Take action and take control of your health.

Healthy lifestyle choices can help improve your blood pressure and lower your risk of serious disease.

- › **Be active** – Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic exercise per week. Include muscle-strengthening exercises at least two days a week.⁴
- › **Maintain a healthy weight** – If you're overweight or obese, losing weight can help you control your blood pressure.
- › **Eat well** – Choose nutritious whole foods prepared at home instead of processed foods. Include fruits and vegetables rich in potassium.
- › **Use less salt** – Check food labels for sodium content. Limit sodium to 1,500 mg or less per day.⁴
- › **Drink less alcohol** – If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation: no more than one drink per day for healthy women and men over 65, and up to two drinks a day for men age 65 and younger.⁴
- › **Quit tobacco** – Talk with your doctor if you need help.
- › **Manage stress** – Take care of your health – body and mind.

If lifestyle changes aren't enough, your doctor may prescribe medications to help control your blood pressure.



1. WebMD. "Symptoms of High Blood Pressure." <https://www.webmd.com/hypertension-high-blood-pressure/guide/hypertension-symptoms-high-blood-pressure> (May 23, 2018). 2. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. "High blood pressure (hypertension)." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/symptoms-causes/syc-20373410> (May 12, 2018). 3. American Heart Association. "Understanding Blood Pressure Readings." <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/understanding-blood-pressure-readings> (last reviewed November 30, 2017). 4. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. "Elevated blood pressure." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/prehypertension/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20376708> (October 5, 2018).

This is general health information and not medical advice or services. Always consult with your doctor for appropriate examinations, treatment, testing, and health care recommendations.

All Cigna products and services are provided exclusively by or through operating subsidiaries of Cigna Corporation, including Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, Cigna Behavioral Health, Inc., Cigna Health Management, Inc., and HMO or service company subsidiaries of Cigna Health Corporation. The Cigna name, logo, and other Cigna marks are owned by Cigna Intellectual Property, Inc. All pictures are used for illustrative purposes only.