

## What is Hypertension?

Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure. Blood pressure refers to the force of blood against the blood vessel walls. Normally a person's blood pressure rises and falls during the day. However, when blood pressure constantly stays higher than normal (140/90 mm Hg or higher), a person is considered to have hypertension.

## What Causes Hypertension?

For about 90-95% of people with mildly elevated blood pressure, sedentary lifestyle, smoking, excess abdominal weight, a fatty diet, alcohol consumption and stress contribute to the condition. For the other 5-10% of people, there may be a serious underlying cause of high blood pressure that requires urgent medical attention.

Risk factors for developing hypertension that you cannot change are:

- family history of hypertension or cardiovascular disease
- age of 45 or older (men) or 55 or older for women.

Risk factors for developing hypertension that you can control include lifestyle choices such as:

- smoking
- excessive alcohol consumption
- physical inactivity
- excess weight and high fat diet

## How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

Unfortunately, a person with high blood pressure usually sees or feels no clearly identifiable symptoms of hypertension. That is why you should have your blood pressure measured by your physician, using a blood pressure measuring device. Hypertension is confirmed if blood pressure falls in the following 3 stages of severity.

Severity of Hypertension	Systolic Pressure	Diastolic Pressure
Stage 1	140 to 159 mm Hg	90 to 99 mm Hg
Stage 2	160 to 179 mm Hg	100 to 109 mm Hg
Stage 3	180 mm Hg or higher	110 mm Hg or higher

## What are the Complications of Hypertension?

Hypertension can lead to a number of potentially life-threatening conditions if it is not controlled or treated. The higher your blood pressure, the greater your risk of developing the following problems:

- **Heart Disease:** Hypertension is a major risk factor for heart attack, and the number one risk factor for congestive heart failure (CHF).
- **Stroke:** Hypertension is the leading risk factor for stroke. Very high blood pressure can make a weakened blood vessel rupture and bleed into the brain causing a stroke. A blood clot blocking a narrowed artery can also cause a stroke.
- **Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD):** Hypertension is the second leading cause of chronic kidney disease (diabetes is its leading cause). Hypertension not only causes kidney disease, but it also speeds the deterioration of kidney function to the point where life-saving measures such as dialysis or kidney transplant are needed.
- **Retinopathy (eye damage):** Hypertension can cause small blood vessels to burst or bleed. This can lead to impairments such as blurred vision, or even blindness.

