

What else can you do?

Always ask your provider what your blood pressure is and write it down. Keep track of your blood pressure numbers with the log at the MyHealth@Vet website: www.myhealth.va.gov.

Your provider may prescribe medicine to help lower your blood pressure.

- Take your medicine every day, or as directed by your provider.
- If your blood pressure numbers get lower, it's because your medicine is working. Don't stop it or take a lower dose unless your provider says you should.

Here are some questions to ask your provider:

- Is my blood pressure under good control?
- How often should I have my blood pressure checked?
- What is a healthy weight for me?
- Is it safe for me to start doing regular physical activity?

Do you have other questions for your provider? Write them down here.



For more information, please contact your local VA Medical Center or Health Clinic.



Heart and Circulation

Talk With Your Health Care Provider About High Blood Pressure



This brochure was produced by:



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration, Office of Patient Care Services
National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
www.prevention.va.gov

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www.preventiveservices.ahrq.gov



Why is high blood pressure dangerous?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against your blood vessels. If this pressure rises and stays high over time, it is called hypertension (“Hi-pur-TEN-shun”). *If it is not controlled, high blood pressure can cause:*

- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Kidney problems
- Heart failure
- Eye problems

Most people with high blood pressure feel healthy and don’t have symptoms. The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked.

How do you get checked for high blood pressure?

Checking your blood pressure is simple. Your provider places a fabric cuff around your upper arm and pumps it full of air. Your provider then listens to your heartbeat while the air lets out of the cuff.

Follow these steps to help your provider correctly measure your blood pressure:

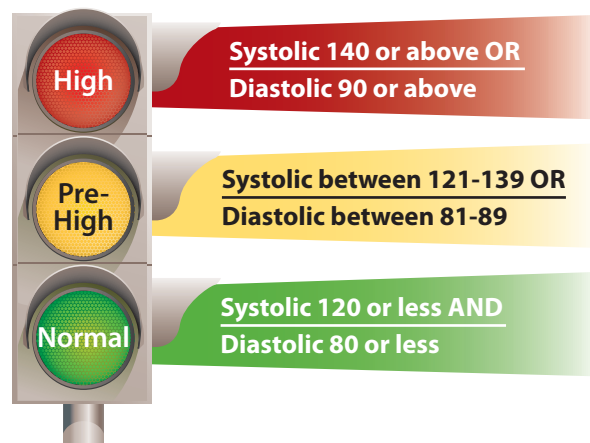
- Wear a short-sleeved shirt or blouse.
- Empty your bladder.
- For at least 30 minutes before your appointment, **don’t:**
 - Smoke
 - Do any vigorous activity
 - Drink caffeine (in coffee, tea, or cola)
- Sit down and relax with your feet on the floor and your back supported for at least 5 minutes before your blood pressure is checked.
- Don’t talk while your blood pressure is being checked.

What do your blood pressure numbers mean?

Blood pressure is measured by two numbers.



The first (or top) number—“**systolic**”—is the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats. The second (or bottom) number—“**diastolic**”—is the pressure in your blood vessels between heartbeats.



If your blood pressure is normal, that’s great! You should have it rechecked every year or so to be sure it stays within the normal range.

If your blood pressure is pre-high or high, it should be rechecked to determine whether you have hypertension. Ask your provider the following questions:

- When should I have my blood pressure checked again?
- Do I need treatment for high blood pressure?

What can you do to prevent or control high blood pressure?

1. Quit smoking and/or chewing tobacco.

Ask your provider for help with quitting.



2. Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

If you are overweight, ask your provider for help with a plan to lose weight.

3. Be physically active.

- “Physical activity” includes any activity that raises your heart rate, such as brisk walking, working in the house or yard, or playing sports.
- Do activity for 10 minutes or more at a time. Aim for at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of activity each week.

4. Reduce salt (sodium) in your diet.

- Read food labels. Choose and prepare foods that are low in sodium or are sodium-free.
- Ask to see a registered dietitian if you need help with a plan.

5. Limit alcohol.

- Men should have no more than 2 drinks per day.
- Women should have no more than 1 drink per day.