

Hypertension

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Hypertension is most commonly known as high blood pressure. Though it is one of the major causes of cardiovascular disease, it is often called “the silent killer” because it rarely gives rise to physical symptoms. Blood pressure is the measure of the force that blood exerts on the arterial walls. The measurement is given as two numbers. The systolic pressure is the top number which measures the pressure in the arteries when they are filled with blood when the heart beats. The diastolic pressure is the bottom number which measures the pressure in the arteries between heart beats when the heart is at rest. A healthy adult has a blood pressure of about 120/80. A patient is considered to have high blood pressure if it is consistently measured to be 140/90 or higher. High blood pressure causes the heart to work harder in order to pump blood to the rest of the body. Thus, it is the leading cause of stroke and the major cause of heart attack. Though the precise cause of high blood pressure is unknown, there are many factors that contribute to its development including: smoking, lack of physical activity, stress, consuming more than 1-2 alcoholic beverages daily, obesity, family history of heart disease/high blood pressure, overconsumption of salts and fats, diabetes and kidney disease. There are many drugs that work to treat and lower high blood pressure. However, the best defense against hypertension is to prevent it early on. Although hypertension is not limited to overweight people, it is imperative to be physically active and exercise on a regular basis. It is also important to manage stress levels and for diabetics to carefully monitor their blood sugar. Lastly, reducing the amount of salt and fats consumed as well as alcohol and tobacco intake can be crucial in the prevention of high blood pressure.