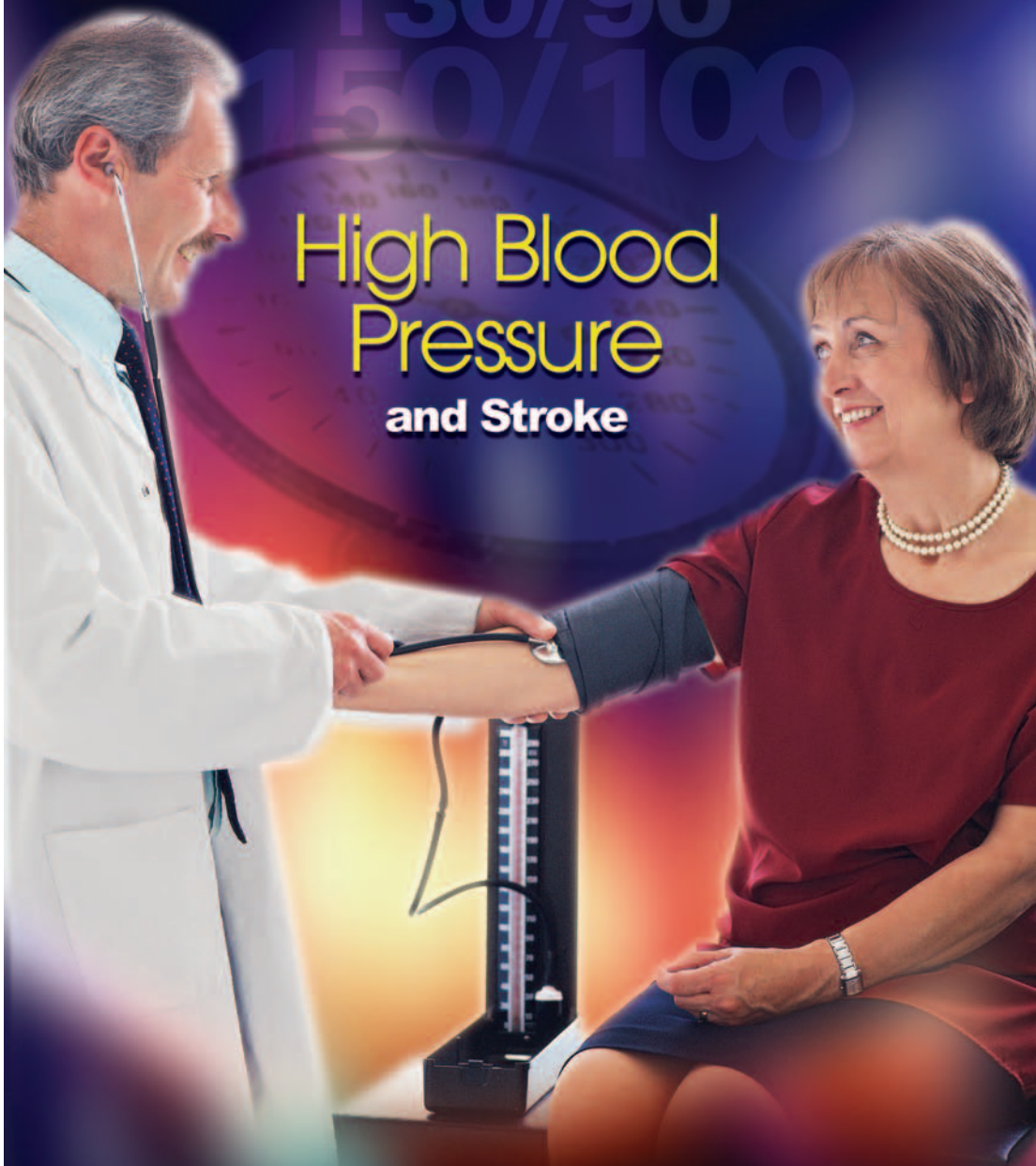


120/80  
130/90  
150/100

# High Blood Pressure and Stroke



**National Stroke  
Association™**  
[www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)

# Reduce Stroke Risk - Control Your Blood Pressure

## What is blood pressure?

Blood is carried from the heart to the rest of your body in vessels called arteries. Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries.

Your blood pressure reading is always given as two numbers, with one written above or before the other - for example, 120/80. The first number, called systolic blood pressure, represents the force of your blood as your heart pumps. The second number, called diastolic blood pressure, is the force of your blood as your heart rests.

You can check your blood pressure at your doctor's office, at health fairs, at your local pharmacy or at home with an automatic blood pressure machine. It is easy to do and can save your life.

## What is normal blood pressure?

For adults age 18 and older, a blood pressure reading below 120/80 is considered normal. In general, the lower the blood pressure, the better.

## What is high blood pressure?

A blood pressure reading of 140/90 or above is considered high blood pressure, or hypertension.

A blood pressure reading of 120-139 for the first number or 80-89 for the second is considered pre-hypertension. People with pre-hypertension are at an increased risk for high blood pressure (hypertension) and should ask their doctor how they can monitor their blood pressure carefully.

## What are your numbers?

### Blood pressure guidelines for people over the age of 18

Normal:	below 120/80
Pre-hypertension:	120-139/80-89
Stage 1 hypertension:	140-159/90-99
Stage 2 hypertension:	160/100 or higher

## Who has high blood pressure?

About 65 million Americans – 1 in 3 adults – have high blood pressure. Of these, almost one third don't even know they have it.

- More than half of all Americans age 60 or older have high blood pressure
- 2 out of 5 African Americans have high blood pressure

## Why is high blood pressure dangerous?

If you have high blood pressure, your heart is pumping harder to move blood through the body. This can weaken blood vessels and damage major organs such as the brain, heart, and kidneys. Left untreated, it can lead to such life-threatening medical problems as stroke, heart attack, or kidney failure.

Doctors have called high blood pressure "the silent killer" because you can have it for years and not know it. All this time the high blood pressure can be causing damage to your body. There are no signs or symptoms.

High blood pressure kills nearly 50,000 Americans each year.

## How does high blood pressure increase stroke risk?

Uncontrolled high blood pressure increases a person's stroke risk by 4 to 6 times. It may:

- thicken the artery walls, causing cholesterol or other fat-like substances called plaque to build up. The plaque build up can then break off of artery walls causing a clot and blocking blood flow to the brain, which may cause a type of stroke called an ischemic stroke
- weaken the artery walls, leading blood vessels to break and bleed into the brain, causing what is called a hemorrhagic stroke







## What causes high blood pressure?

In most cases, it's impossible to pinpoint an exact cause of high blood pressure. Some groups, however, are at higher risk.

Your risk of high blood pressure is higher if:

- someone in your family has high blood pressure
- you are a man over the age of 45
- you are a woman over the age of 55
- you are African American
- your blood pressure reading is in the pre-hypertension range (120-139/80-89)

Other things that can increase blood pressure include:

- being overweight
- eating too much salt
- not eating enough potassium
- not exercising
- having diabetes
- drinking too much alcohol

## How can high blood pressure be treated?

In most people, high blood pressure can be controlled through healthy habits and taking medicines – or a combination of both.

Ask your doctor about healthier choices that can reduce your blood pressure:

- Enjoy a low sodium (salt), low fat diet
- Include exercise in your daily routine
- If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation

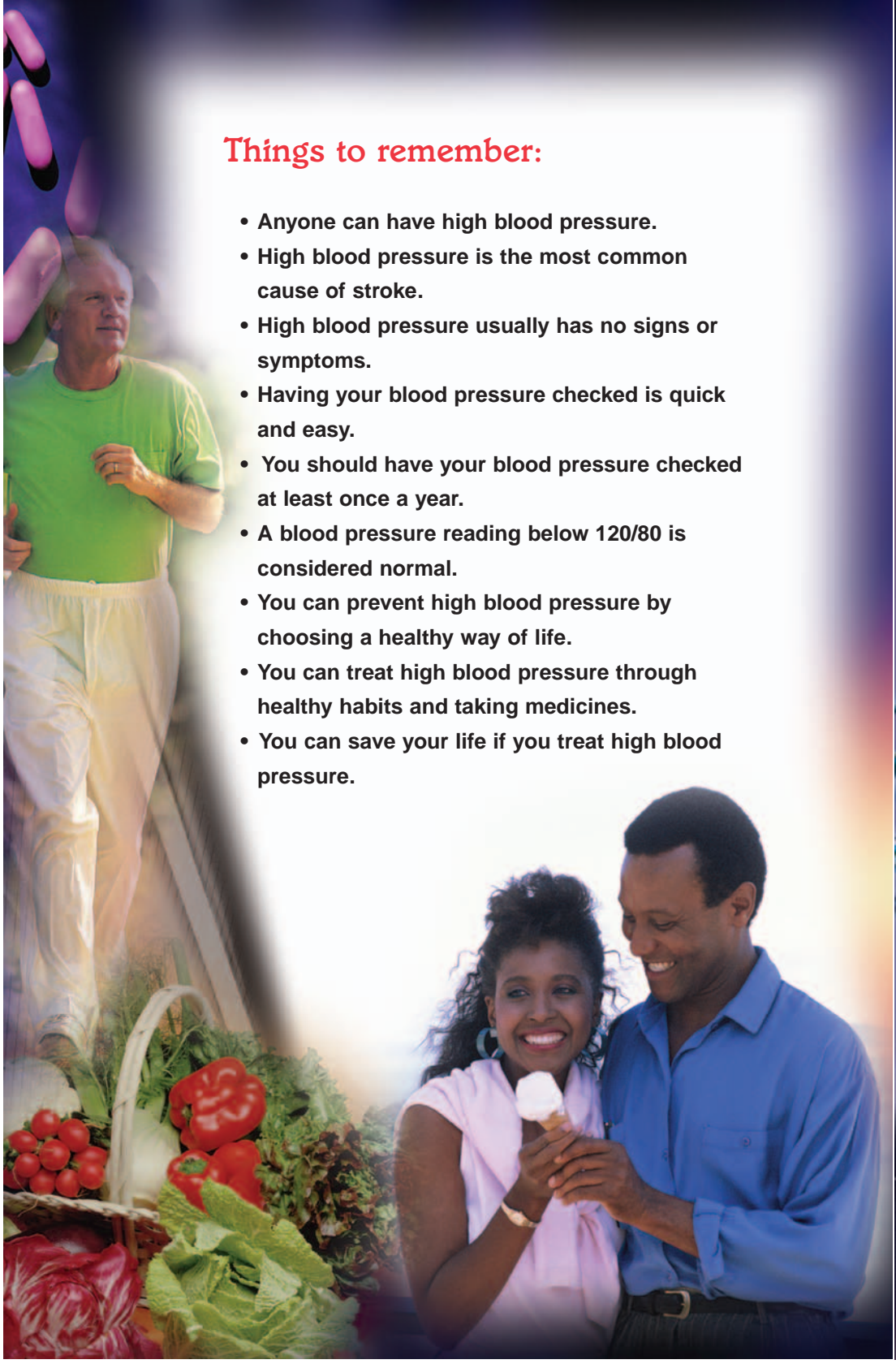
For some, these lifestyle changes won't be enough to lower their blood pressure to a normal range. These people will probably need to take medicines to control their blood pressure.

- Partner with your doctor to determine which of the many blood pressure drugs are best for you
- Try not to get discouraged if you have to try several different drugs before you find the right one; this is common
- Stay on your medication – even when you feel fine

If you have already had a stroke, lowering your blood pressure can reduce your risk of having another stroke – even if you do not already have high blood pressure.

## Things to remember:

- Anyone can have high blood pressure.
- High blood pressure is the most common cause of stroke.
- High blood pressure usually has no signs or symptoms.
- Having your blood pressure checked is quick and easy.
- You should have your blood pressure checked at least once a year.
- A blood pressure reading below 120/80 is considered normal.
- You can prevent high blood pressure by choosing a healthy way of life.
- You can treat high blood pressure through healthy habits and taking medicines.
- You can save your life if you treat high blood pressure.





## Where can I get more information on high blood pressure and stroke?

Ask your doctor how you can lower your blood pressure and your risk for stroke.

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health can also provide information about high blood pressure and its treatment. Visit its web site at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov> for more information.

## Know the symptoms of stroke!

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg - especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Call 911 if you have or see someone having a stroke. Treatment can be more effective if given quickly!





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