HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Nearly 1 in 2 women have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, or are taking blood pressure medication in the United States. Hypertension tends to increase with each decade of life, but many women are not aware they have it. That's why it is important to have your blood pressure checked at least once per year, ideally at every clinic visit.

Hypertension is known as the 'silent killer' because it often has no warning signs or symptoms. If uncontrolled, high blood pressure can be harmful for your heart and cause significant health concerns.

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THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR WOMEN WITH HEART DISEASE

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WOMENHEART: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease is the nation's first and still only patient centered organization exclusively focused on serving millions of American women living with or at risk for heart disease — the leading cause of death in women. WomenHeart is solely devoted to advancing women's heart health through advocacy, community education, and the nation's only patient support network for women living with heart disease. WomenHeart is both a coalition and a community of thousands of members nationwide, including women heart patients and their families, physicians, and health advocates, all committed to helping women live longer, healthier lives. To learn more or to donate visit womenheart.org.

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HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels. It is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg) and recorded with two numbers:

Systolic Pressure: the pressure on your blood vessels when your heart beats — **ideally <120**

Diastolic Pressure: the pressure on your blood vessels when your heart is at rest — **ideally <80**

When blood pressure is too high, it can damage the vessels and create health issues.

The best way to know if you have high blood pressure is to get it checked by a health care provider.

It's important to know your numbers and track them.

- Blood pressure should be measured at every clinic visit.
- If you are diagnosed with hypertension, ask your provider if you should also check your blood pressure at home.

For an accurate reading, the measurement should be taken while in the seated position, with feet on the floor and arm supported at heart level, after 5 min of rest.

Even if your numbers are normal now, your risk increases as you get older. This is why it's important to have your blood pressure checked at least annually.

Unfortunately, **less than 1 in 4** women with high blood pressure have their condition at goal. If left untreated, it can lead to:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Heart failure
- Kidney disease
- Cognitive impairment and dementia

Lifestyle Changes Make a Difference!

MAKE HEART HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES: A DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating pattern (fruits, veggies, whole grains, low-fat dairy) has been shown to lower blood pressure by 5-8mmHg.

CUT BACK ON SODIUM: Staying below 2,300mg/day can lower blood pressure by 6-8mmHg. Lowering sodium further is even better.

BOOST POTASSIUM: Foods rich in potassium can help lower blood pressure by about 6 mmHg. Aim for 3,500-5,000mg/day.

LIMIT ALCOHOL: Best is none, but if you drink, no more than 1/day (lowers 4–6 mmHg).

MANAGE YOUR WEIGHT: Even 5% weight loss makes a difference (can lower systolic blood pressure by 4-6mmHg); every kilo (about 2.1 pounds) lost lowers pressure by ~1 mmHg.

Your clinician may also prescribe medications for blood pressure. Often more than one or even two medications are needed to keep blood pressure at goal. Discuss your treatment plan and your personal blood pressure target with your healthcare team.

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High blood pressure is common, but it can be managed.
Know your numbers and take steps to protect your health.

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