

What are the Symptoms of High Blood Pressure?

Almost half (46%) of all Americans have hypertension, or high blood pressure, says the [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#).

Unlike many conditions, hypertension has no symptoms. By leading a healthy lifestyle, knowing our family risks and blood pressure numbers, we can prevent or catch hypertension when it is most treatable.

What [hypertension?](#)

is

1 IN 4 OF US will have a stroke in our lifetime, but most strokes can be prevented with a few simple steps. Here's one tip to reduce our risk of stroke.

Control high blood pressure.

Half of all strokes are linked to hypertension. Knowing your blood pressure and controlling it with lifestyle change or medication will reduce your risk of stroke.

When you get your blood pressure measured, you will hear two numbers: systolic

and diastolic. **Systolic blood pressure** is the measurement of how much force our blood exerts on our arteries' walls during a heartbeat. **Diastolic** readings define how much force the blood exerts against our arteries between heartbeats. High blood pressure means there is too much stress on your blood vessels.

"Hypertension is a vascular disease that starts early in life," says [Dr. Maria Delgado-Lelievre](#), a cardiology expert at the University of Miami Health System. "It causes the blood vessels to behave abnormally, which is called endothelial dysfunction. This leads to progressive increases in blood pressure. The pressure can create consequential damage to our vital organs."

Dr. Delgado-Lelievre is respected nationwide for her clinical research on the subject. Hypertension is the number one risk factor for heart attack and stroke — which cause more deaths than any other disease in America, she says.

National statistics and risks

Between 2005 and 2015, death rates from high blood pressure increased more than 10%, according to a [recent annual summary](#) compiled by the AHA, the CDC, and the National Institutes of Health. Some ethnic and racial groups are more at risk, including African-Americans and Latinos. But numbers have risen overall for all Americans. Part of the increase is due to the high rates of obesity in America.

A big worry, according to the report, is that roughly 20% of U.S. adults with hypertension do not even know they have it.

Without symptoms, how can you tell you have high blood pressure?

Some sources may cite symptoms such as severe headaches, vision problems, irregular heartbeat or chest pain. The CDC, however, puts these into perspective.

They are not symptoms of high blood pressure. They are signs of some of the consequences of high blood pressure, as well as symptoms of many other illnesses.

If we won't feel any symptoms, how are we supposed to prevent it from occurring? Dr. Delgado-Lelievre says we need to pay attention to related health, social, and genetic factors.

"Many risks factors, such as obesity, smoking, sedentarism, alcohol, drugs, stress, fatty diet, salt intake, can affect and worsen the vessels' function and accelerate hypertension expression," she says.

"We cannot change our genes. We can, however, modify behaviors to decrease lifestyle and social risk factors."

The most important factor in addressing hypertension is understanding our risk, says Dr. Delgado-Lelievre. Only then can we prevent or control the disease.

Some tips:

- **Ask your parents**, grandparents, uncles, aunts if they take blood pressure pills. If they do, you likely to have a genetic risk of developing hypertension.
- **Know your numbers.** Routinely having your blood pressure reading taken is the only way to know if you have elevated blood pressure levels, or hypertension. If your blood pressure is greater than 120/80, you may be hypertensive or at risk of developing high blood pressure.
- **Go to your doctor.** Get your blood pressure evaluated, ask questions about prevention, get treated and change your lifestyle if needed.

Finally, "hypertension is not a one person disease," says Dr. Delgado-Lelievre. High blood pressure is there, everywhere, close to you.

“Empower yourself, empower your family, your friends and your community. Awareness, early detection and treatment are the first steps to decrease the risk of heart attack and stroke. Anyone who shares your genes has the same or greater risk. So open up a conversation and talk about it with your kids, your brothers, sisters, and your family.”

UHealth’s Hypertension Clinic provides in-depth screening and personalized treatment for high blood pressure. [Request an appointment online](#), call 305-243-5554, or take our free [HeartAware online risk assessment](#) today.

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