

Facts about High Blood Pressure and High Cholesterol

Heart disease

One in three Americans has some form of heart disease. Your risk of having heart disease is higher when you have more than one risk factor. Some risk factors for heart disease are:

- High blood pressure (see blood pressure section)
- High cholesterol (see cholesterol section)
- Being overweight
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- History of early heart disease in your family
- Age
 - Men 45 years or older
 - Women 55 years or older

Your doctor may want to treat some of these risk factors with medicine. This can happen even if you have a healthy diet and are active.

What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls. It is measured using two numbers:

- The top number is called systolic pressure. Systolic pressure is when the heart beats.
- The bottom number is called diastolic pressure. Diastolic pressure is when the heart rests between beats.

Normal blood pressure is referred to as “120/80”. High blood pressure is:

- 140/90 mm Hg or higher needing blood pressure medicine
- 130/80 mm Hg or higher for patients with diabetes or chronic kidney disease

Symptoms are high blood pressure dizziness, flushing, blurred vision, and headaches.

What is Cholesterol?

High cholesterol usually has no direct symptoms. Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like substance. It is found in your blood and in all your body’s cells. Too much cholesterol in your blood may lead to a

higher risk of heart attack or stroke. The most important types of cholesterol are:

- “Good” cholesterol (HDL)
- “Bad” cholesterol (LDL)

Low HDL (less than 40 mg/dL) is a risk factor for heart disease. The higher your LDL and the more risk factors you have, the higher your chance of heart disease or heart attack. Ask your doctor what your cholesterol goals should be. Keep track of your cholesterol results.

You may have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or both. If so, your doctor may give you medicines to lower them. Be sure to take them as directed. If you have any side effects, let your doctor know.

Steps to lower risk

There are things you can do to lower your risk of heart attack or stroke:

- **Eat healthy foods.** These foods are low in:
 - Saturated fat
 - Cholesterol
 - Salt
- **Try to stay at a healthy weight.** Take steps to lose weight if needed.
- **Exercise.** Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most or all days of the week. Talk to your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- **Don’t smoke.** People who smoke have more than twice the risk of heart attack.
- **Limit your alcohol use.** Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure. If you drink alcohol, try to limit it to:
 - One drink a day for women
 - Two drinks a day for men
- **Find out if you have diabetes.** If you do, it is important to follow your treatment plan.
- **See your doctor regularly.** It is important that your doctor checks your cholesterol and blood pressure.