

What is Hypertension?

What is High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)?

High blood pressure (also referred to as HBP, or hypertension) is when your blood pressure, the force of blood flowing through your blood vessels, is consistently too high. If left unmanaged, it can lead to damaged organs as well as other illnesses, such as kidney failure, aneurysm, heart failure, stroke, or heart attack. The American Heart Association guideline states that an individual has high blood pressure if their blood pressure is consistently 130/80 mm Hg or higher. The best way to diagnose high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure measured.

If you have high blood pressure, you are not alone. Nearly half of American adults have high blood pressure. (Many don't even know they have it.)

What causes High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)?

Hypertension usually develops slowly over time. If hypertension runs in your family, if you don't maintain a proper diet, are overweight, or are over 60, you are at greater risk for high blood pressure. Some other risk factors include:

- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- A diet heavy in sodium
- Not enough Vitamin D or potassium in your diet
- Oral contraception use
- Stress
- Kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Sleep apnea

There are usually no symptoms of high blood pressure. You should get your blood pressure checked regularly, and if you receive consistent high blood pressure readings, you should seek treatment. If you don't control your blood pressure, you could develop one or more of the following conditions:

- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Heart failure
- Aneurysm
- Metabolic syndrome

Know Your Numbers

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure tested. Understanding your results is key to controlling high blood pressure.

Healthy and Unhealthy Blood Pressure Ranges

Learn what's considered normal, as recommended by the [American Heart Association](#).

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)	and/or	DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120 – 129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130 – 139	or	80 – 89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

Your blood pressure is recorded as two numbers:

- **Systolic blood pressure** (the first number) – indicates how much pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls when the heart beats.

- **Diastolic blood pressure** (the second number) – indicates how much pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls while the heart is resting between beats.

Preventing and Managing High Blood Pressure

By living a healthy lifestyle, you can help keep your blood pressure in a healthy range.

- Practice the following healthy living habits as preventive measures:
 - Eat a healthy diet
 - Keep yourself at a healthy weight
 - Be physically active
 - Do not smoke
 - Limit alcohol consumption
 - Get enough sleep

How is High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Treated?

Treatment options include changing diet/exercise habits, general lifestyle changes, and/or medications. However, for individuals whose blood pressure is abnormal, it usually requires lifelong medication.

At USC, we offer faculty, staff, and dependents resources to help with high blood pressure management. To learn more and for additional information, please visit the links below:

[Blood Pressure Screenings](#) by USC School of Pharmacy
Available to the public by appointment only. Note, there is a small fee for the screening.

[Health Assessment Incentive](#) (Benefit-eligible Staff and Faculty who work at least 50% FTE, excluding Verdugo Hills and Las Vegas employees)
*Power of Vitality offers a number of resources to empower you for healthier living including helping you check key measurements to help improve or maintain your health. In addition, you can receive \$40/month premium reduction in 2023, you must complete **both** the [Vitality Health Review](#)[®] (VHR) and the [Vitality Check screening](#) by **Friday, December 16, 2022**.*

- *The quick, confidential [Vitality Health Review](#)[®] helps you and your doctor identify lifestyle and healthy habits you can address to improve or maintain your health.*
- *The [Vitality Check](#) includes measures of body mass index, cholesterol, triglycerides, blood sugar, blood pressure and waist to hip ratio*

For more information

visit: <https://employees.usc.edu/wellness-benefit/>

[Healthy Lifestyle Programs](#) (Kaiser HMO Members)
Healthy lifestyle program offerings consisting of personalized, online programs to help you create an action plan to reach your health goals. Topics include eating healthy, losing weight, sleeping better, and more. Kaiser HMO members can participate in this program at no extra cost.

[Lifestyle Redesign for Hypertension](#) by USC Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy (USC PPO/EPO members and dependents)
Occupational therapists work with you in a holistic manner to help you take control over the lifestyle factors that impact your blood pressure. Please call (323) 442-3340 or email OTFP@med.usc.edu to schedule an appointment or evaluation.

[USC Premier Care Hypertension Program](#) (USC PPO/EPO members)
The USC Premier Care team, in partnership with your USC primary care physician, pharmacist and occupational therapist, will help you get your blood pressure under control.

[USC Premier Care Tobacco Cessation Program](#) (Faculty and Staff enrolled in a USC Medical Plan)
These participants will receive support, tips, and medication recommendations from USC nurses, pharmacists, and occupational therapists to help them successfully stop smoking. For more information on Tobacco Cessation resources please visit this [website](#).

For more information regarding your employee medical plan with USC, please visit the links below:

[USC Trojan Care EPO](#)

[USC EPO Plus](#)

[USC PPO](#)

[Anthem HMO](#)

[Kaiser HMO](#)

Additional Resources:

[American Heart Association](#)

[WebMD Frequently Asked Questions about Hypertension](#)

[Keck Medicine of USC "Everything you need to know about blood pressure"](#)

Sources:

<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/the-facts-about-high-blood-pressure/what-is-high-blood-pressure>

<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/understanding-blood-pressure-readings>