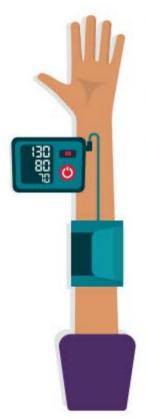Healthy Blood Pressure for Healthy Hearts
Small Steps To Take Control

Every time your heart beats, it pumps blood through vessels, called arteries, to the rest of your body. Your blood pressure is how hard your blood pushes against the walls of the arteries. If your blood flows at higher than normal pressures, you may have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension.

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the United States. Millions of Americans have high blood pressure, but many people who have it don't know it. That's why it is important to have your blood pressure checked at least once a year.

High blood pressure is a "silent killer."

It doesn't usually cause symptoms, but it can damage your body over time.

- If your blood pressure stays higher than 130/80 mm Hg for a period of time, it can cause serious health problems such as:
  - **Heart disease**
  - **Stroke**
  - **Kidney disease**
  - **Dementia**
- The only way to know whether you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure measured—a process that is simple and painless.
- If you find out you have high blood pressure, a health care professional can tell you how to prevent serious complications, including disability and premature death.

Some things put us at greater risk for high blood pressure.

Age: Blood pressure tends to get higher as we get older. But it can affect many of us when we're younger too.

Genes: High blood pressure often runs in families.

Sex: Before age 60, more men than women have high blood pressure. After age 60, more women than men have it.

Race or ethnicity: While anyone can have high blood pressure, African Americans tend to get it at a younger age. Among Hispanic adults, people of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican backgrounds are at higher risk.

Lifestyle habits: Eating too much salt, drinking too much alcohol, being obese, smoking, and not getting enough exercise can raise our blood pressure.

What steps can you take to lower your blood pressure?

Set targets
Work with your doctor to set blood pressure numbers that are healthy for you. Use our worksheet at **nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension** to track your progress.

Take control
Make lifestyle changes such as eating healthy, staying active, and watching your weight. If you smoke, quitting can help prevent heart disease and other complications of high blood pressure.

Work together
Studies show that if you engage in heart healthy activities with people at home, at work, in your community, or online, you have a better chance of staying motivated.