

What is high blood pressure?

- Blood pressure normally rises and falls throughout the day based on the kind of activity in which an individual is engaged.
- High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a disease that occurs when blood pressure stays above normal for a long time. As a result, the walls of arteries get stretched beyond their healthy limit, and damage occurs creating a variety of other health problems.
- Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries, which are vessels that carry blood from the heart to other parts of the body.
- Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg) using two numbers.
 - The first/top number, systolic blood pressure, represents the pressure in blood vessels when the heart contracts.
 - The second/bottom number, diastolic blood pressure, represents the pressure in blood vessels when the heart relaxes between beats.
- High blood pressure usually has no warning signs or symptoms, so many people do not know that they have it. The only way to know whether you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure accurately measured.
- High blood pressure can lead to serious complications, including death, if not treated. However, controlling blood pressure through healthy lifestyle practices and/or medications could prevent or delay the development of complications.
- A hypertensive crisis is a medical emergency and occurs when blood pressure numbers rise above 180 for the systolic pressure or 120 for the diastolic pressure.

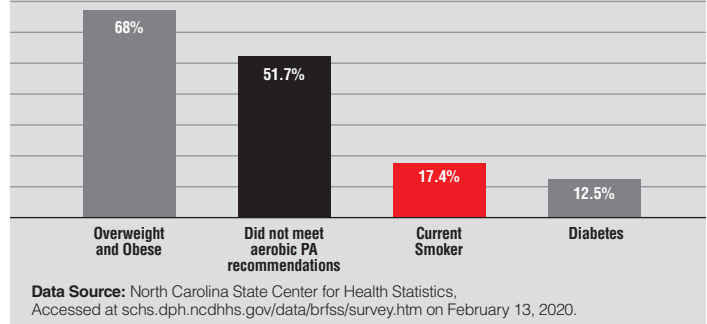
How many people are affected by high blood pressure?

- High blood pressure is the 13th leading cause of death in the United States.¹
- In North Carolina in 2018, high blood pressure was the primary cause of 1,014 deaths and a contributing cause to 24,326 heart disease and stroke deaths.² That means high blood pressure causes or contributes to at least 27% of all deaths in North Carolina each year.
- About 45% of adults in the United States (108 million) have hypertension defined as blood pressure greater than 130/80 or are taking medication for hypertension.³
- About 2.8 million adults in North Carolina (35%) have been diagnosed with high blood pressure by a health care professional.³
- High blood pressure led to 40,481 hospital admissions and \$1.4 billion in hospital charges in North Carolina in 2018. That equates to \$35,625 per admission.
- The North Carolina Medicaid program spent \$205 million on 68,083 beneficiaries with high blood pressure in 2018.⁴ That's about \$3,013 per beneficiary with high blood pressure.

What are the risk factors for high blood pressure?

- Risk factors that cannot be controlled include: advanced age, gender (men between 45-64 years and women 65 years and older), race/ethnicity (African-Americans) and heredity.
- Risk factors that can be controlled include: overweight/obesity, physical inactivity, smoking and secondhand smoke, diabetes, excessive alcohol consumption and a unhealthy diet of processed foods high in sodium (Figure 1).
- Elevated blood pressure and protein in urine during pregnancy is known as preeclampsia and usually resolves within six weeks after delivery. Having preeclampsia during more than one pregnancy is a risk factor for high blood pressure later in life.

Figure 1. Prevalence of modifiable risk factors for high blood pressure, North Carolina, 2017–2018



What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

- High blood pressure is sometimes referred to as the “silent killer” because it usually has no warning signs or symptoms, so many people don’t realize they have it.
- Only when blood pressure readings soar to very high levels (systolic of 180 or higher OR diastolic of 120 or higher) do obvious symptoms occur, such as severe headaches, severe anxiety, shortness of breath and nosebleeds occur. This is known as a hypertensive crisis and is a medical emergency.

How is high blood pressure diagnosed?

- A trained health professional uses blood pressure measurement devices to diagnose high blood pressure, as shown in Table 1.
- Your doctor may recommend monitoring your blood pressure at home in addition to your healthcare visits. For recommendations on selecting a blood pressure monitor and instructions for taking accurate blood pressure measurements at home, please visit the [American Heart Association website—Symptoms, Diagnosis & Monitoring of High Blood Pressure page](#).

Table 1: The New Definition of Hypertension

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic Blood Pressure		Diastolic Blood Pressure
Normal	Less than 120 mmHg	and	Less than 80 mmHg
Elevated	120–129 mmHg	and	Less than 80 mmHg
Hypertension			
Stage 1	130–139 mmHg	or	80–89 mmHg
Stage 2	Greater than or equal to 140 mmHg	or	Greater than or equal to 90 mmHg

Source: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. Facts about Hypertension. [cdc.gov/bloodpressure/facts.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/facts.htm)

What are the complications of high blood pressure?

- For years, blood pressure above 140/90 mmHg was said to be uncontrolled high blood pressure and could lead to serious complications. Blood pressure below 140/90 mmHg was said to be controlled high blood pressure and would likely not lead to serious complications.
- However, the 2017 Guidelines for Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Management of High Blood Pressure in Adults recommended that blood pressure readings greater than 130/80 mmHg be classified as elevated.⁵
- More than two out of every three people (69%) who have a first heart attack, three out of every four (77%) who have a first stroke and three out of every four (74%) who have chronic heart failure also have high blood pressure.⁶
- Other complications of high blood pressure include kidney damage, vision loss, erectile dysfunction, memory loss, fluid in the lungs, angina and peripheral artery disease.

