

HEART, HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND STROKE: THE CONNECTION



What do high blood pressure and stroke have in common?

Many people believe that high pressure only affects one's heart, and that stroke exists as a response to stress on the brain. However, both of these ideas are misconceptions. While in some scenarios they could be true, one of the biggest and most overlooked causes of stroke is, in fact, high blood pressure. Often called the silent killer, high blood pressure does not only affect one's heart but can lead to life-threatening conditions such as heart failure and stroke.

Reduce Your Risk of Death

Currently, over 75 million Americans suffer from high blood pressure, while over 54% of the Americans who are diagnosed do not have it under control, though they may think they do. If high blood pressure remains uncontrolled, the risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke and death greatly increase. As the heart has to work harder to pump blood in a person who is diagnosed with hypertension, one's blood vessels to the brain can be damaged or weakened causing them to rupture or leak and ultimately cause a stroke.

Reducing your high blood pressure, even by a little at a time can decrease your risk of death dramatically. For example, did you know that reducing your high blood pressure by 1 mmHg reduces the risk of heart disease and death by 2%? Or, by reducing your high blood pressure by 15 mmHg reduces the risk of heart disease and death by 30%

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Reducing your high blood pressure means more than the immediate gratifications of a healthier lifestyle, increased energy, and overall health. Reducing your high blood pressure is, in fact, a matter of life and death. Every 40 seconds, someone dies of a stroke. Don't allow yourself to be one of the victims.

Know Your Numbers

Called the silent killer, high blood pressure insidiously plagues many people without their awareness. When we

equate high blood pressure with just anxiety, stress, and even poor eating habits, we only look at a small piece of the puzzle. More often than not, high blood pressure affects people without revealing any symptoms at all. Its silent existence can sneak up causing damage to the heart, resulting in more serious cardiovascular complications such as a heart attack, heart failure, and stroke that can quickly lead to death.

The best way to get ahead of high blood pressure is to refrain from diagnosing yourself based on how you may be feeling but instead understand and know your numbers. The guidelines for high blood pressure have **recently changed**, and it's important to understand your health in light of these new guidelines:

- Normal: Less than 120/80 mmHg
- Elevated: Systolic between 120-129 and diastolic less than 80
- Stage 1: Systolic between 130-139 or diastolic between 80-89
- Stage 2: Systolic at least 140 or diastolic at least 90 mmHg
- Hypertensive crisis: Systolic over 180 and/or diastolic over 120, with patients needing prompt changes in medication if there are no other indications of problems, or immediate hospitalization if there are signs of organ damage

Receiving regular checkups by your doctor is definitely a must in terms of making sure your blood pressure is under control. However, due to the silent nature of high blood pressure, we strongly recommend purchasing a medical grade high blood pressure monitor to use at home; the small investment will allow you to keep a



record over time. Watching and knowing your numbers will be your best indicator for determining if you are at risk for a stroke or sudden death.

Calculate Your Risk

Once you do know your numbers, it is actually possible to calculate your risk for stroke or cardiovascular complications. Using this **risk calculator** will determine if your blood pressure is, in fact, under control. While many Americans are diagnosed with high blood pressure and sometimes being treated by their doctor with multiple medications, their blood pressure remains uncontrolled. If you are on three or more medications, yet your high blood pressure and risk for further complications remain high, it may be time to inquire about alternative therapies to help control your high blood pressure to achieve a long-term solution.