

# High Blood Pressure

## WHAT IS IT?

**Hypertension** (high blood pressure) remains an under-diagnosed and under-treated risk factor. Currently, hypertension affects about 50 million people in our country and approximately 1 *billion* individuals worldwide. Furthermore, as we become more sedentary, heavier and eat more and more processed and salt-rich foods, we set ourselves up for developing high blood pressure. The stress of our go-go-go world doesn't help. And we can't wipe out something we're not measuring or monitoring.

## MORE ABOUT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Untreated hypertension is one of the leading causes of heart failure. And just as the initial phases of heart failure can be completely silent, hypertension is completely silent also. So you could be literally destroying your heart without knowing it. Now is the time for you to get to know your blood pressure levels and what your goals should be, and to learn how you can reach those goals.

Two numbers make up your blood pressure — the **systolic** blood pressure (the “top number”) and the **diastolic** blood pressure (the “bottom number”). So in a typical blood pressure reading of 130/80 mmHg, 130 is the systolic value and 80 is the diastolic reading.

Hypertension is defined as a reading above 140/90 mmHg (measured at rest on at least 2 separate occasions). A blood pressure over 120/80 mmHg but below 140/90 mmHg is known as **prehypertension**, and a blood pressure at or below 120/80 mmHg is what is considered normal.

Blood pressures between 120/80 mmHg and 139/89 mmHg are considered worrisome enough that people with these readings should try to change aspects of their lifestyles that contribute to elevated blood pressures. Indeed, recent data suggest that patients with prehypertension have a threefold increase in their risk of having a heart attack.

Things YOU can do to lower your blood pressure readings include losing weight, eating a healthy diet, reducing the amount of sodium in your diet to well below 2400 mg (the equivalent of 1 teaspoon of table salt per day), and stopping smoking. Regular physical activity is pivotal as well.

Many medications can be used to lower blood pressure. An effective program can be devised for your particular situation. At times it requires several attempts of different dosages and combinations of medications to attain the desired result. The important part is to establish a goal, and within a reasonable time, to attain that goal.