



# What Is Hypertension?

Has your doctor told you that you have hypertension or high blood pressure? Do you wonder what this means for your body? You cannot look at yourself in the mirror and see that you have high blood pressure, and you cannot always feel that your blood pressure is high. So if you cannot see or feel it, how can this simple reading be so important?

Your blood pressure gives your doctor a peek into your circulatory system. If you have a high number, it tells your doctor that your heart is working harder to pump blood through your body. Over time, all of the extra work can result in weakened heart muscle and organ damage. Your arteries can also suffer. When your blood pressure is high, your arteries become hard and narrow. When that happens, you increase your risk of:

- Stroke
- Kidney failure
- Cardiovascular disease



After you get your blood pressure taken, what do the numbers mean? The top number is called the systolic pressure. It measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart is pumping. The bottom number is the diastolic pressure. It measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart is resting and refilling with blood between beats. A normal blood pressure reading is a systolic reading below 140 and a diastolic reading below 90. If you have diabetes or another condition, it may need to be lower.