Hypertension and Family Health History

What is a family health history?
A family health history is a portrait of the shared lives and health of your extended family.

Screening recommendations

... for individuals WITH A FAMILY HISTORY of hypertension

Family history is a risk factor for hypertension but there are no specific screening guidelines for individuals with a family history of hypertension.

Talk to your health care provider to make a personalized plan to maintain your health.

... for individuals WITH NO KNOWN FAMILY HISTORY of hypertension

Blood pressure should be measured every two years beginning at age 18.
Hypertension risk factors and what you can do about them

**Things you can change**

- **Obesity:** Greater weight leads to greater risk
- **Diet:** A diet high in fat, calories, and sodium and low in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables increases risk
- **Exercise:** An inactive lifestyle increases risk
- **Caffeine:** Increases blood pressure
- **Salt:** Eating too much salt raises some people’s blood pressure
- **Alcohol:** Heavy and regular use of alcohol can increase blood pressure dramatically
- **Stress:** Increases risk
- **Smoking:** Smoking injures blood vessel walls and speeds up the process of hardening of the arteries

**Things you can’t change**

- **Family history:** If your parents or other close blood relatives have high blood pressure, you’re more likely to develop it
- **Age:** Risk increases with age
- **Race:** African-Americans develop high blood pressure more often than Whites, and it tends to occur earlier and be more severe
- **Sex:** The number of women with hypertension increases with age and is higher than men after age 54

**What can you do if you have a family history of hypertension?**

- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Eat a balanced diet including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and lean meats
- Be active
- Drink alcohol sensibly
- Manage your stress
- Talk to your health care provider about your family health history of hypertension
- See your health care provider for regular risk assessment and counseling about managing risk factors
- Get regular blood pressure screening
- Take medications to control your blood pressure

**Sources**

- American Heart Association, www.americanheart.org
- Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.com
- National Cancer Institute, www.cancer.gov
- National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, www.nhlbi.nih.gov