



Visit your doctor to talk about your health and the medicines you may need. This factsheet will give you information about types of medicine. You will learn what questions you should ask your doctor about those medicines. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is very important for your health.

About High Blood Pressure

Many people in the United States die from high blood pressure. This condition usually does not cause symptoms. Most people do not notice it until it is too late.

A person has high blood pressure when the blood pushes against the walls of the arteries harder than normal. Over time, this can increase your chances of getting a heart attack and stroke, damage your kidneys, make you go blind, and cause you to have problems with having sex. If you want to learn more about high blood pressure read the following information.



How do you know if you have high blood pressure?

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to get it checked using a blood pressure cuff. This is done at the doctor's office. When measuring your blood pressure you will see one number on top of the other like you see in this picture.

- Your blood pressure is normal when the number on top reads 120 or less and the number on the bottom reads 80 or less.
- You have high blood pressure when the number on top is 140 or higher and the number on the bottom is 90 or higher.



Check your blood pressure...

- at least one time every two years,
- more often if you are 50 or older, and
- every time you visit a doctor no matter what your age is.



What can you do to control high blood pressure?

Here are some recommendations:

Change your diet



Eat lots of fruits, vegetables, grains, and low fat dairy products like low fat milk, cheese, and yogurt. You should also eat fish and beans.



Eat less salt



Do not eat more than a teaspoon of salt a day. Season your food with herbs and spices.



Drink less alcohol



For men, do not have more than 2 drinks a day. For women, do not have more than one drink a day.

1 drink is equal to:



Exercise and lose weight

Try to exercise at least 30 minutes a day and as many days as you can.



If diet and exercise are not able to help you, then your doctor may need to give you a medicine for high blood pressure.



How do doctors treat high blood pressure?

If your blood pressure is over 140/90 or if you have other health problems like diabetes or heart failure, your doctor may want you to start with a prescription medicine.



In the United States, “generic” medicines are just as good as brand-name medicines. They are very safe and work just like the brand-name medicine, and they cost a lot less money. Ask your doctor if you can get a generic medicine instead of a brand-name medicine.

These are some of the types of medicines doctors prescribe to treat high blood pressure, depending on the person’s health situation:

Diuretics: Doctors will usually try a diuretic first. These medicines work very well and are available as generics.

Calcium-channel blockers: Doctors prescribe these medicines to a person who is African-American, or to a person that also has:

- chest pain (angina),
- problems with their heart beat (arrhythmia), or
- migraine headaches.

ACE Inhibitors: Doctors prescribe these medicines to a person who also has:

- diabetes,
- heart failure,
- kidney disease, or
- had a heart attack or stroke.

ARBs (angiotensin II receptor blockers): Doctors prescribe these medicines to a person who has been taking an ACE Inhibitor, but it made the person cough too much or did not work well.



About side effects

When you take medicines for high blood pressure follow the instructions on the label about how much to take. Also, make sure you know the possible side effects, such as:

- Diuretics can cause cramps, vomiting, or make your heart beat faster. Call your doctor if this happens.
- Medicines for high blood pressure can make the sugar in your blood go up or down. If you also have diabetes check your blood sugar levels very carefully.
- Medicines for high blood pressure can make a condition called gout get worse. Gout is a type of arthritis. If you have gout, let your doctor know and watch for signs, such as a swollen big toe or knee.



Medicines for treating your high blood pressure

Doctors prescribe the medicines listed below to treat high blood pressure. Your doctor will consider several factors, like your race and how healthy you are, to decide which medicine to recommend.

Type of Medicine	Name of Generics
• Thiazide diuretics	⇒ <i>chlorthalidone, hydrochlorothiazide</i>
• Calcium-channel blockers	⇒ <i>amlodipine, diltiazem</i>
• ACE Inhibitors	⇒ <i>benazepril, enalapril, lisinopril</i>
• ARBs	⇒ <i>losartan</i>

To learn more about this topic go to:

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2011/03/best-drugs-to-treat-high-blood-pressure/index.htm>



How to Get the Best Price for Your Medicines

- **Ask for a generic:** Tell your pharmacist you want a generic medicine instead of the brand-name. You will pay less for a generic. Not all brand-name medicines have a generic, but many do.
- **Compare prices:** Call or visit three different pharmacies. Give them the name of the medicine and ask how much it costs. Ask if they have a drug discount program that can help you pay less for your medicine. Buy your medicine from the pharmacy that gives you the cheapest price.
- **Sign up for patient assistance programs:** Most companies that make medicines have programs that help people that don't have a lot of money and do not have insurance to get brand-name medicines for free or at a low cost. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance can help you find a program: www.pparx.org or 1-888-477-2669.

This series is produced by Consumer Reports and *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*, a public information project made possible by a grant from the States Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin. This brief should not be viewed as a substitute for a consultation with a medical or health professional. It is provided to enhance communication with your doctor, not replace it.