

The Effect High Blood Pressure Has on Your Body

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If you're suffering from high blood pressure, you're probably wondering what effect it has on your body. There are many things that high blood pressure can do to harm you and put you at risk for health problems.

Before you can understand the effect it has on you, it's important to understand what it really is and how it happens. You have to understand the basics of high blood pressure and how it can negatively impact your body.

What Is Blood Pressure?

With all the numbers you have to keep track of, you may be a bit confused about what blood pressure actually is. Quite literally, this is the pressure of your blood on the walls of your blood vessels.

Your blood vessels are basically a set of interconnected tubes. The pressure of your blood flowing through them keeps them open. Much like your garden hose gets open and taut when filled with water, your blood vessels fill with blood.

If your blood pressure is too low, blood can't be transported properly to all the cells of your body. If it's too high, you're at risk for heart disease and even stroke. It's important to keep your blood pressure in the normal range for optimum health.

When your heart is at rest, your blood pressure is lower. This is the "diastolic" pressure and is represented by the bottom number of your blood pressure. You want this number to be close to 80.

As your heart is actively pumping, it puts more pressure on the walls of your blood vessels. This is called your "systolic" pressure and is represented by the number on top of your blood pressure reading. You want this to be close to 120.

These numbers are actually measurements of pressure on the blood vessel walls. Your healthcare provider can take your blood pressure using a special cuff and

instrument called a sphygmomanometer. You can also find digital machines in pharmacies or purchase one yourself to keep at home.

Having high blood pressure one time isn't a big problem. Stress, infections, and activity can cause changes in blood pressure. But taking consistent readings when you're at rest will give you a picture of your overall blood pressure and if it's consistently high, you need to pay attention.

And the number you need to pay the most attention to is the bottom number. It's not as likely to fluctuate with other changes in the body. But when that number is high, you're more at risk for problems.

Breaking Down Blood Vessels

Perhaps the greatest damage that high blood pressure does is to damage the vessels that move the blood around your body. This is a critical transport system that delivers oxygen and nutrients and takes away carbon dioxide and wastes.

In particular, high blood pressure affects the arteries. These are vessels that take blood away from the heart to deliver oxygen and nutrition. They are under higher pressure than veins, which take blood back to the heart.

Having constantly high pressure causes the cells that make up the inside of your blood vessels to become damaged. They can actually become hardened. You might think at first that this makes them stronger, but it actually makes them weaker.

The tissue of the blood vessels needs to be elastic so that it can stretch when pressure increases and go back to its original shape when pressure decreases. But when arteries become hard, they can't expand and contract.

Then as you eat a diet that's high in fats, those fats can collect in the hardened areas of the arteries and eventually cause blockages. Because this system delivers blood to all parts of the body, many parts of the body can get reduced nutrition and oxygen.

Eventually blockages can lead to heart attacks – a condition where the heart doesn't get enough oxygen and tissue actually dies. You can also become the victim of a stroke – bleeding in the brain that has the same result of tissue death.

When arteries become weak, they can develop aneurisms. These are areas of weak walls in the arteries that bubble out. As they bubble out, they become stretched and unnaturally thin.

Eventually these can burst and can be a cause of stroke. You can also bleed to death internally when an aneurysm bursts and there are often no symptoms that this is even happening until it's too late to repair.

If all this sounds pretty scary – it should. Heart disease and stroke are the number one killers of both men and women – higher than any cancers or other illnesses. This isn't something to be taken lightly.

Hurting Your Heart

While we've discussed how heart attacks can happen when arteries are damaged, there are some other problems that high blood pressure can cause for the heart.

When your heart is constantly under arterial high blood pressure, it has to work harder. This constant wear and tear on the heart can cause it to simply get weak and wear out.

Even if you don't have a heart attack, you can still suffer from heart failure. As the heart becomes weaker, it's not able to pump nutrients and gases to the tissues and this begins to affect all systems of the body.

If you have had a heart attack that's damaged your heart, this progression into heart failure can happen even faster. This greatly increases your risk of future heart attacks and heart failure.

You can also have problems specifically in the arteries that supply blood to your heart. These are called coronary arteries. They're specialized in that they deliver blood from your heart back to your heart to provide it with oxygen and nutrients.

If they become hardened or blocked, they can cause your heart to perform at a lower rate and even cause a heart attack. They can also cause you to have an irregular heartbeat or chest pain.

Normally your heart is about the size of your fist, but when you have high blood pressure you can suffer from an enlarged heart on one side. The left side of your heart is responsible for delivering blood to the rest of the body.

When you have high blood pressure this side can get harder and can also get larger. An enlarged heart is not as efficient as a heart that's the normal size for your body. This can increase your risk of a heart attack and heart disease.

Killing Your Kidneys

Your kidneys are also greatly affected by having high blood pressure. These are actually the organs that regulate your blood pressure. They do that by decreasing or increasing the fluid in your blood.

When you have high blood pressure, your kidneys can actually develop scars. Within your kidneys are millions of tiny blood vessels that become damaged when they're exposed to constant high pressure.

As they become scarred, they're less able to do their job of filtering blood. This can cause your body to not be able to filter waste properly and can lead to kidney disease.

You can also have an aneurysm in your kidney blood vessels. This type of aneurysm is very deadly because of how much blood travels through your kidneys – your entire blood supply passes through them. You could die from massive internal bleeding.

Finally, you may develop kidney failure. Kidney failure is the inability of your kidneys to filter waste either because of damage to large or small arteries that deliver blood to them.

When this happens, you may have a buildup of toxins and have swelling due to increased body fluids. Over time you may require the process of dialysis. This is

when blood is removed from the body and filtered in a machine then sent back to the body.

Ultimately, when you have kidney failure you may need a kidney transplant. However, the list for this is very long and the poorer your overall health is, the less likely you are to get an organ transplant.

Brain Damage

High blood pressure is also very bad for the brain. As we already discussed, high blood pressure puts you at increased risk of stroke. The effects of a stroke can include paralysis, memory loss, and even death.

However, there are other problems associated with high blood pressure. For example, people with high blood pressure are at a greater risk for dementia. This can be a result of not having enough oxygen being delivered to the brain.

You can also have impairment to your brain that keeps you from being able to process information. The earlier you begin to have high blood pressure, the greater the damage will be as you age.

Problems in the Bedroom

One of the most common causes of erectile dysfunction in men is high blood pressure. High blood pressure affects all the blood vessels in the body and can decrease flow to the penis.

But don't think that you're off the hook if you're a woman. Women also rely on strong blood flow to the vaginal area for sexual arousal and satisfaction. It's important to both sexes to keep blood flowing freely.

In fact, treating high blood pressure often eliminates the need to take drugs such as Viagra for sexual dysfunction. Your best bet for good sexual health is good heart health.

You can also have trouble sleeping. Studies note that high blood pressure and sleep apnea go hand in hand. Sleep apnea keeps you from getting enough sleep and actually puts you at risk for heart disease and other problems.

Eye Opening Issues

Your eyes are also very sensitive to changes in your blood pressure. The blood vessels of the eyes are very small and fragile and particularly vulnerable to damage from high blood pressure.

When the retina is not supplied with blood correctly, it can become damaged. You can have blurred vision or even a complete loss of vision when blood pressure goes unchecked.

You're particularly at risk for this type of problem if you also have diabetes. Diabetes and high blood pressure greatly increase your risk of eye disease and loss of sight.

You can also have blocked blood vessels leading to your optic nerve. This, too, can lead to permanent blurred vision and even blindness. It's critical that you pay attention to your blood pressure to have good vision.

Finally, problems with high blood pressure can lead to a buildup of fluid in your eye. This excess pressure can cause damage and scarring inside the eye and lead to permanent vision deterioration.

Bad to the Bone

You can even suffer from bone loss as a result of problems with your blood pressure. People with high blood pressure lose more calcium than those who have normal blood pressure.

As calcium leaves the bones and enters the bloodstream, bones can be left weak and brittle. This increases your risk for osteoporosis and broken bones. In fact, most hip fractures in seniors are really a result of bone disease.

While men can suffer from osteoporosis, women are generally more at risk after menopause. It's important to keep track of your blood pressure and take corrective action when you need it.



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