



MDwise

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High Blood Pressure in Children

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard the blood pushes against the walls of the arteries as it moves through the body. High blood pressure happens when the blood is pushing too hard. Another name for high blood pressure is hypertension.

Blood pressure readings include two numbers. For example, a child's reading might be 96/57 or "96 over 57." The first number is the systolic pressure. This shows how hard the blood pushes when the heart is pumping. The second number is the diastolic pressure. This shows how hard the blood pushes between heartbeats, when the heart is relaxed and filling with blood.

What is normal and what is high blood pressure depends on your child's age, sex, and height. The numbers will change as your child gets older and grows.

High blood pressure does not have symptoms, but it needs to be treated.

If blood pressure is very high, it can cause serious damage to a child's body, especially the heart and brain. But these serious problems can be prevented by lowering the high blood pressure.



What causes high blood pressure?

In some cases, doctors cannot say exactly what causes high blood pressure. But several things make a child more likely to develop high blood pressure. These include having a family history of high blood pressure and being overweight.

High blood pressure also can be caused by other health problems, such as heart or kidney problems. It also can be caused by medicine the child is taking.

How is it diagnosed?

Children ages 3 and over often have their blood pressure checked during routine well-child visits and checkups. If your child has a reading of high blood pressure, your doctor may want to do a few more readings. Your

doctor might ask you and your child to come back in a week or two for these readings.

Your child might also have to wear a portable device to measure blood pressure over 24 hours. This is called ambulatory blood pressure monitoring.

Your child may need more tests to check for illnesses that may be causing high blood pressure.

How is high blood pressure in children treated?

High blood pressure can be treated with a healthy lifestyle and medicine. If another health problem is causing the high blood pressure, treating the problem usually lowers the blood pressure.

Healthy lifestyle

You can help your child have a healthy lifestyle.

- Help your child lose weight, if your child is overweight. Eating healthy foods and being physically active are the best ways to do this.
- Help your child be active. Your child's doctor can help you make an activity plan. Being active for at least 60 minutes a day might be a good goal.
- Consider less screen time for your child. Your doctor can offer information and support as you think about making this change.

- Help your child eat healthy foods. Your child's doctor may recommend the DASH diet. This eating plan includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nonfat dairy foods. Also help your child limit sodium and sugar in foods and drinks.
- Have a healthy lifestyle together as a family. For example, try to eat as a family at regular times, including breakfast, and find an activity you all can do.

Medicine

Medicines may be used to treat high blood pressure if a healthy lifestyle does not lower blood pressure enough. Medicines may also be used if blood pressure is very high. Your doctor can tell you how long your child may need medicines.

It can be hard to remember to have your child take pills when they have no symptoms. But blood pressure will go back up if your child does not take the medicine. Make your child's pill schedule as simple as you can. Plan times for your child to take the medicine while doing other things, like eating a meal or getting ready for bed.

Medicines for high blood pressure can have side effects. Ask your doctor what side effects to look for and what to do if you see them.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.