

High Blood Pressure Causes

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The Two Types of High Blood Pressure

Over 72 million Americans have been diagnosed with high blood pressure. Ninety-five percent of those affected have essential hypertension, or high blood pressure, due to a number of factors such as salt in the diet, obesity, lack of [exercise](#) and unmanaged daily stress. The remaining 5 percent have secondary hypertension, which is caused by problems in other parts of the body such as the kidneys, adrenal glands and aorta.

Risk Factors for Essential Hypertension

A number of risk factors exist for essential hypertension: age, familial history, ethnic origin, sensitivity to salt and lack of exercise. Some causes can be managed; others can't. The most common cause of high blood pressure is age. As we age, we lose the natural elasticity in our arteries. As the pressure of the blood pushes against the inside of the arteries, the pressure rises instead of being absorbed.

Individuals with a familial history of high blood pressure are at higher risk to contract the disease than those with no history. The incidence of high blood pressure is typically higher in African Americans than it is for Caucasians and Asians.

Some individuals are sodium sensitive, meaning that eating salt and salty [foods](#) forces their body to retain water. The added volume of water in the blood causes more pressure against the arterial walls. A sedentary lifestyle also contributes to hypertension. Individuals who carry extra weight in the form of stored fat force the heart to pump harder to distribute blood to the body, which adds pressure to the arterial walls.

Renal Hypertension

The remaining 5 percent of people with secondary hypertension have a disorder in an organ or body part, such as the kidneys. High blood pressure caused by the kidneys is called renal hypertension; it occurs when there is a narrowing or thickening of the renal artery due to atherosclerosis, which supplies blood to the kidneys. If the arterial walls become thicker, less blood reaches the kidneys, so the heart has to work harder to supply the same amount of blood.

Adrenal Gland Tumors

In a small percentage of people, two rare forms of tumors on the adrenal glands cause secondary hypertension, hyperaldosteronism and pheochromocytoma. In hyperaldosteronism, the tumor produces an excessive amount of aldosterone, which ultimately leads to loss of potassium through the urine. Pheochromocytoma produces excessive catecholamines that cause a rapid heart rate and profuse sweating.

Coarction of the Aorta

A rare disorder in children called coarction of the aorta is characterized by a

narrowed portion of the aorta (the large artery that leaves the heart). The narrowed segment, called the coarction, causes a reduced blood flow to the kidneys, which leads to an elevation in blood pressure.