

## **Complications of High Blood Pressure**

When blood pressure rises over time, it can damage the body and cause complications. Some common complications and their signs and symptoms include:

- **Aneurysms:** When an abnormal bulge forms in the wall of the artery. Aneurysms develop and grow for years without causing signs or symptoms until they rupture, grow large enough to press on nearby body parts, or block blood flow. The signs and symptoms that develop depend on the location of the aneurysm.
- **Chronic Kidney Disease:** When blood vessels narrow in the kidneys, possibly causing kidney failure.
- **Cognitive Changes:** Research shows that over time, higher blood pressure can lead to cognitive changes. Signs and symptoms include memory loss, difficulty finding words, and losing focus during conversations.
- **Eye Damage:** When blood vessels in the eye burst or bleed. Signs and symptoms include vision changes or blindness.
- **Heart Failure:** When the heart can't pump enough blood to meet the body's needs. Common signs and symptoms of heart failure include shortness of breath or trouble breathing, feeling tired and swelling of the feet, legs, abdomen, and veins in the neck.
- **Peripheral Artery Disease:** A disease in which plaque builds up in leg arteries and affects blood flow in the legs. When people have symptoms, the most common are pain, cramping, numbness, aching, or heaviness in the legs, feet, and buttocks after walking or climbing stairs.
- **Stroke:** When the flow of oxygen-rich blood to a portion of the brain is blocked. The symptoms of a stroke include sudden onset of weakness, paralysis or numbness of the face, arms, or legs, trouble speaking or understanding speech and trouble seeing.

*Contact your Primary Care Physician for more information.*

## **Stop Smoking**

- Be committed. Keep in mind when you want to quit and stay motivated.
- Get help from your doctor and continue to follow up with your doctor, especially during the first month.
- Choose a firm date to quit and mark your calendar. Choose a time that is not particularly stressful and that does not involve situations associated with smoking.
- Begin to cut back prior to your quit date.
- Consider joining a stop-smoking program. Counseling and information about programs in your state are available at 1.800.QUIT.NOW (784.8669)
- Tell friends, family, and coworkers that you are quitting so that they can offer motivation and support.
- Remove smoking from your environment. Avoid places where people congregate to smoke. Remove cigarettes from your car, home, and work.
- Anticipate that you may experience withdrawal symptoms, such as cigarette cravings, anxiety, irritability, and restlessness, even with nicotine replacement or drug treatment. These symptoms usually peak at 1-3 weeks after quitting but generally become manageable within a few weeks.
- Eat a healthy diet and stay active to help with stress and to minimize weight gain.

*Contact your Primary Care Physician for more information about quitting smoking.*

## **What should you do if you have a high BMI?**

If your BMI score is 25 or above, ask your doctor to check your waist circumference and see if you are at risk for disease based on your weight. Your doctor can help you plan steps to stay healthy or improve your health. You may need to make lifestyle changes such as changing your diet and getting regular exercise. If you are Asian, your health may be at risk even with a lower BMI.

## **Risks of being underweight (low BMI)**

If you are underweight (BMI less than 18.5), you may be malnourished and develop: compromised immune function, respiratory disease, digestive diseases, cancer, osteoporosis.

## **Where can I find out more?**

National Heart, Lung, Blood Institute

Obesity Education Initiative

301.592.8573 [www.nhlbi.nih.about.oei](http://www.nhlbi.nih.about.oei)

Weight Control Information Network

877.946.4627 (toll free) [www.win.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov)

*Contact your Primary Care Physician for more information about weight control.*