

High Blood Pressure in Children

What causes high blood pressure in children?

High blood pressure, or hypertension, sometimes doesn't have a known cause. This is called primary hypertension and is more common in older children, children who are overweight, or children who have a family history of high blood pressure. Secondary hypertension is caused by another medical problem, most often kidney disease.

How can I tell if my child has high blood pressure?

In children, normal blood pressure values are based on the age, height, and sex of the child. Your doctor should measure your child's blood pressure at every office visit beginning at three years of age to see if it is normal for your child.

High blood pressure usually doesn't cause symptoms in children. If it is very high, it may cause headaches, vomiting, or seizures. If your child has high blood pressure and any of these symptoms, you should see a doctor right away.

How is it treated?

Any medical problem that may be causing the high blood pressure should be treated.

All children with high blood pressure should

make lifestyle changes to help lower their blood pressure. It will be easier for your child to change unhealthy habits if the rest of the family does too. Doing the following can help lower blood pressure:

- Eating healthy foods, like fruit, vegetables, nonfat dairy, lean meats, and whole grains, and not eating a lot of fast food, sweets, and salt
- Exercising 30 to 60 minutes most days of the week
- Spending less than two hours per day watching television, using the computer, or playing video games

• Avoiding tobacco, alcohol, and drugs
Kids with very high blood pressure, blood pressure that doesn't get better with lifestyle changes, or possible heart or blood vessel damage need medicine to help lower blood pressure.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Pediatrics

Web site: <http://www.healthychildren.org/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Web site: <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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