

More Americans now at risk for hypertension

If you didn't have high blood pressure before, you might now. That's because in November, the American College of Cardiology, the American Heart Association and nine other groups updated their blood pressure guidelines, lowering the rates at which Americans are considered at risk for hypertension.

If you've ever had your blood pressure checked, you know you get two numbers: one over the other. The top number is your systolic blood pressure, which measures how much pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls when the heart beats. The bottom number is your diastolic blood pressure, which measures how much pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls when the heart is resting between beats.

The change, the first in 14 years, lowered the rate considered high blood pressure from 140 over 90 to 130 over 80. According to *The Washington Post*, that means 46 percent of U.S.

adults are now considered hypertensive, up from 32 percent under the old guideline.

The chart below explains the levels of risk.

High blood pressure is the second-leading cause of preventable death in the United States, after smoking. Hypertension leads to heart attacks, strokes, severe kidney disease and other problems that kill millions every year. Blood pressure is affected by genetics, age, diet, exercise, stress and other diseases such as diabetes. Men are more likely to have high blood pressure than women and African-Americans are more likely than whites. Many people are unaware that they have the condition because there are no symptoms.

While there's no cure for high blood pressure, lifestyle changes and medication can help reduce your risk:

- Eat a well-balanced, low-salt diet that emphasizes vegetables, fruits and fat-free or low-fat products; includes whole

grains, fish, poultry, beans, seeds, nuts and vegetable oils; and limits sodium, sweets, sugary beverages and red meats.

- Limit alcohol.
- Enjoy regular physical activity.
- Manage stress.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Quit smoking.
- Take your medications properly.

There are a number of inexpensive medications available to help treat high blood pressure. If you have concerns about your blood pressure, you should consult your doctor.

The groups mentioned above have changed the guidelines in the hope that more Americans will adjust their behavior, especially younger adults. The lower score is expected to triple the number of men younger than 45 considered hypertensive and double the number of women under 45 with high blood pressure.

As reported by the *Post*, Thomas Frieden, the former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who now runs a global health initiative that focuses on heart disease and stroke, said the "big news about this guideline is it should end forever any debate about whether people should be treated with medicines once they hit 140/90." He said that until now there has been "a perspective that it's not that big of a risk, but that's just wrong."

"The fact is, lower is better," Frieden said. "Even what we considered mild hypertension before is a deadly disease." **PR**

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120 – 129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130 – 139	or	80 – 89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120