BELIEVE in Healthy Blood Pressure
A Guide for Blacks or African Americans

Featuring Yolanda Adams
Grammy Award–winning Gospel-music singer
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This booklet and DVD program are a call to the Black or African American community to take action against a common threat: high blood pressure (HBP).

More and more Black or African American adults have this serious condition. Today, about 4 out of 10 Black or African American adults in the US have high blood pressure. That’s one of the highest rates in the world. HBP increases the chance you will have a heart attack, a stroke, kidney problems, or heart failure. A recent study found that Black or African American adults are 20 times more likely than whites to die from heart failure.

Blacks or African Americans are at higher risk for high blood pressure. Factors affecting blood pressure include:

- Family history of high blood pressure
- How much you exercise
- What you eat
- Other diseases you might have

But it doesn’t have to be this way. High blood pressure (also called hypertension) can be managed and lowered to safer levels. The choices you make can greatly affect your health!

This booklet and DVD will help you learn important information about high blood pressure. You’ll see that you can take steps to help control it—and help lower your risk of serious related health problems.

Taking one small step at a time can make a big difference! Talk with your health care professional. There are many ways to successfully manage this serious condition.

Defining the Black Community

This booklet uses the phrase “Blacks or African Americans.” This broad term includes people having origins in Africa as well as people from other regions, such as the Caribbean.

High blood pressure has contributed to the early deaths of some prominent members of the Black or African American community, including:

- Booker T. Washington
- Grammy Award–winner Luther Vandross
- Actor Paul Winfield

Lost Too Soon
Blood pressure is easy to measure. A health care provider uses a stethoscope and a pressure gauge, which usually wraps around your upper arm. First your systolic pressure is measured, then your diastolic pressure. The results are two numbers, and the systolic number is always the higher of the two. It is written above or before the diastolic number.

For example, pressures less than $\frac{120}{80}$ mm Hg or 120/80 mm Hg are considered normal.

Pressures between $\frac{120}{80}$ mm Hg and $\frac{139}{89}$ mm Hg are considered to be pre-hypertension. If your numbers are in this range, you may be at risk for having high blood pressure. High blood pressure is when your systolic blood pressure is equal to or above 140 mm Hg or your diastolic pressure is equal to or above 90 mm Hg. If either of these numbers is high, you need to take steps to help lower it.

### Blood Pressure Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Systolic Pressure</th>
<th>Diastolic Pressure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Less than 120</td>
<td>AND Less than 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-hypertension</td>
<td>Between 120–139</td>
<td>OR Between 80–89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>140 and above</td>
<td>OR 90 and above</td>
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Blood is carried from the heart to all parts of your body in blood vessels. Each time your heart beats, it pumps blood out into the vessels. Blood pressure is created by the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the vessels as it is pumped by the heart.

The force of the blood flow is highest when the heart squeezes during a heartbeat. This is called systolic (pronounced “sis-TOL-ik”) pressure. In between beats, the heart is at rest. Blood pressure is then at its lowest and is referred to as diastolic (“di-a-STOL-ik”) pressure.

Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) and is recorded as two numbers usually written one above the other: for example, $\frac{120}{80}$ mm Hg. The top number is the systolic number, and the bottom number is the diastolic number. Both pressures are key measures of your health.
Why is High Blood Pressure Bad?

High blood pressure puts strain on your blood vessels and your heart. Your heart has to work harder to push blood on every heartbeat. This can lead to an enlarged heart and, eventually, heart failure or a heart attack. The high pressure in the blood vessels also can cause blood to leak out, into the brain. This can cause a stroke. This is why it’s so important to treat high blood pressure early and bring it down to normal levels as quickly as possible.
Most cases of HBP (about 90%) have no known specific cause. But some factors increase your chances of developing this disease, such as:

- Being Black or African American
- Whether you have close blood relatives with a history of high blood pressure
- What you eat—especially foods containing a lot of salt
- Whether you are overweight or don’t exercise much
- Your age; older age increases risk
- Whether you drink too much alcohol

One possible cause of high blood pressure affects only women. Some women develop a type of HBP during pregnancy called *preeclampsia*. It usually goes away after the baby is born, but sometimes it can linger. Women with this kind of high blood pressure in pregnancy, even if it goes away after the baby is born, may be more likely to get hypertension later in life.

Sometimes blood pressure may appear higher than it really is. That’s because some people get nervous when they visit their doctor. This anxiety may temporarily raise their blood pressure. This is called “white coat hypertension.” If you or your doctor suspect this may be happening, your blood pressure can be taken at home or in non-medical settings. Another method is to use a machine that automatically records your blood pressure several times a day.
How Can I Tell if I Have High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure is called a “silent killer” because most people who have it feel normal.

Most people find out about it only when they visit a doctor and have their blood pressure checked. Some people learn about it after they have a major health problem, such as a heart attack or stroke.

That’s why it’s so important to have your blood pressure checked regularly and to “know your numbers.”
You can help lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke by taking some simple steps. You don’t have to do everything at once. Take one step at a time. Not only will you help lower your risk of high blood pressure, but you’ll also boost your overall health. If you use a blood pressure medicine, making these changes may help you manage your blood pressure.

Here are some things that can help lower your BP and/or reduce your risk of heart disease:

- Lose weight if you are overweight. For every 10 pounds you lose, you can lower your systolic blood pressure by roughly 2 to 10 points!
- Reduce the amount of salt in your food.
- Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Be physically active (after talking with your doctor).
- Quit smoking (and avoid other people’s smoke).
- Maintain normal blood sugar levels.
- Maintain healthy cholesterol levels.
- Limit alcohol intake.
Tips for Healthy Eating

You don’t have to go on a special diet or avoid good-tasting food to lower your blood pressure! Old-fashioned, home-cooked meals are often fine—just go easy on the salt and fat. “Slow” food is usually better for you than “fast” food!

DID YOU KNOW?
The chemical name for ordinary table salt is “sodium chloride.” That’s why labels for low-salt foods often say “Low Sodium” or “Sodium-Free.” Many processed foods contain a lot of salt. It’s not just table salt you have to watch out for!

Here are some tips from the American Heart Association:

- Balance how much you eat with your physical activity to maintain a healthy body weight.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt.
- Eat a diet rich in vegetables and fruits.
- Choose whole-grain, high-fiber foods.
- Eat fish at least twice a week.
- Limit your intake of saturated fat.
- Use fat-free (skim) or 1%-fat milk and low-fat dairy products.
- Avoid drinks and foods with added sugar.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

**TIPS**

- Use non-stick pans to reduce the need for butter or oils.
- Cook your food with sunflower, canola, or olive oils instead of butter.
- Use low-fat sour cream or non-fat yogurt on baked potatoes instead of butter.
- Eliminate the butter and just use milk when making mashed potatoes.
- Skim fat from canned broth or soups.
- Purée vegetables to create a thicker, heartier soup base.
- Replace meat with vegetables in tomato sauce.
- Remove skin from chicken before cooking.

**CUT FAT, NOT FLAVOR!**
Exercise is one of the best things you can do to help improve both your body and your mind. Not only may it help lower your blood pressure, it may improve your cholesterol levels, help maintain normal blood sugar levels, and improve your mood.

If you don’t exercise regularly, talk with your doctor before starting. You can begin slowly: just 5 or 10 minutes of walking twice a week, for example. Then you can gradually build up to at least 30 minutes every day.

You don’t have to go to a gym or do anything fancy. Brisk walking can be a fine exercise, particularly if it involves hills. Yard work such as mowing the lawn or raking leaves also counts. There are lots of ways to “sneak in” exercise. You can get off a bus or a subway a few stops before your destination and walk the rest of the way. You can take the stairs instead of an elevator.

The main thing is to simply get moving!
In addition to taking steps such as losing weight and exercising, you may need to use one or more prescription medicines to help lower your blood pressure. Some of these medicines may help lower your chances of developing health problems such as stroke, kidney disease, or heart attack.

Today’s blood pressure medicines can effectively help most people lower their blood pressure and reach the blood pressure goal set by their health care provider.

Blood pressure medicines work in many different ways. Some remove extra fluid and salt from the body. Others slow down your heartbeat or relax and widen your blood vessels. Some pills for high blood pressure combine two different types of medicines. These combination pills can make it easier to keep track of taking your medicines. They may also be more effective than pills that contain only one type of medicine. Since combination pills contain more than one medicine, they also have the potential for more side effects than pills that contain just one medicine.

Some medicines work better for certain types of patients. In fact, some medicines have been found to provide more benefits for Black or African American people than people of other races. Your health care provider can find a medicine that is right for you.

Remember: Even if you are taking medicines, continue to exercise and eat as advised by your health care provider.
Things to Keep in Mind

Blood pressure medicines can produce side effects. If you have unpleasant side effects from your medicines, talk to your health care provider. She or he may be able to adjust your dose or prescribe other medicines.

Remember to take all blood pressure medicines that your doctor prescribes. Be sure you know the names and doses of your medicines and how to take them. Take your medicines exactly as your doctor directs—don’t skip days or cut pills in half. And be sure to continue taking your medicine as directed, even if you feel perfectly fine. When you run out of pills, that does not mean you are done taking your medication. You must continue to refill your prescription until your health care provider tells you otherwise. If you stop taking your medicine, your pressure could rise again, putting you at risk.

As with any medicine, women of childbearing age need to be careful with blood-pressure medicine. If you become pregnant or are planning to become pregnant, tell your health care provider right away. She or he can suggest blood pressure medicines that may be appropriate for both you and your baby.

Even if this is the first day that you start, start now. Today could be the first day of the best of your life!

Yolanda Adams
The Black or African American community faces a serious threat from high blood pressure and related health problems. Too many Black or African American adults die each year from this disease! The good news is that high blood pressure can be managed. Your choices make a big difference. Taking steps to eat right, lose weight, and exercise can help bring your blood pressure under control! In addition, many types of prescription medicines can help lower your blood pressure to healthier levels.

Remember that most people can’t tell they have high blood pressure. That’s why it’s so important to get it checked. It’s a quick, painless measurement. Once you “know your numbers,” you can begin working to make changes. It’s never too soon to begin! Teens and young adults need to watch what they eat and exercise regularly, too!

Work with your health care provider. Follow his or her suggestions. Taking care of your heart may help many other parts of your health. Knowing that you are making healthier choices may put you in a better mood and help you gain a renewed sense of vitality. The important thing is to begin!
Resources

**Association of Black Cardiologists, Inc.**
The ABC is dedicated to eliminating the disparities related to cardiovascular disease in all people of color.
www.abcardio.org

**American College of Physicians**
www.acponline.org
800-523-1546

**American Heart Association**
www.americanheart.org
800-242-8721

**American Society of Hypertension, Inc.**
www.ash-us.org
212-696-9099

**Black Health Care**
BlackHealthCare.com is a culturally oriented and ethnically focused Internet-based health and medical information provider dedicated to addressing the special health problems of African Americans.
www.blackhealthcare.com

**Hypertension Education Foundation, Inc.**
www.hypertensionfoundation.org

**National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**
www.nhlbi.nih.gov
301-592-8573

Sponsor

**Novartis**
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Located in East Hanover, New Jersey, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation is a leader in offering medicines to protect health, cure disease and improve well-being. Our goal is to discover, develop and successfully market innovative products to treat patients, ease suffering and enhance the quality of life. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis Group companies employ approximately 100,000 associates and operate in over 140 countries around the world.
Collaborators

American College of Physicians
The American College of Physicians (ACP) is a national organization of internists—physicians who specialize in the prevention, detection and treatment of illnesses in adults. Established in 1915, ACP is the largest medical-specialty organization and second-largest physician group in the United States. Its membership of over 126,000 includes internists, internal medicine sub-specialists, medical students, residents, fellows, and allied health professionals. Members are physicians in general internal medicine and related subspecialties, including cardiology, gastroenterology, nephrology, endocrinology, hematology, rheumatology, neurology, pulmonary disease, oncology, infectious diseases, allergy and immunology, and geriatrics. Internists treat the majority of adults in the United States. Learn more at the ACP Web site, www.acponline.org.

American Society of Hypertension, Inc.
The American Society of Hypertension (ASH) is the largest US professional organization of scientific investigators and health care professionals committed to eliminating hypertension and its consequences. The Society serves as a scientific forum that bridges current hypertension research with effective clinical treatment strategies for patients. The mission of the American Society of Hypertension, Inc. (ASH) is to promote strategies to prevent hypertension and to improve the care of patients with hypertension and associated disorders.

Hypertension Education Foundation, Inc.
The Hypertension Education Foundation, Inc., was incorporated in 1977 for the purpose of increasing both physicians’ and the general public’s awareness of the problems of treatment, and promoting research and teaching efforts in the field of hypertension. HEF has been active in informing the general public about the consequences of untreated high blood pressure and has also promoted methods to improve physician management of this disease. The President of HEF is Marvin Moser, MD, FACP, clinical professor of medicine, Yale University School of Medicine.

National Medical Association
The National Medical Association (NMA) is the largest and oldest national organization representing African American physicians and their patients in the United States. The NMA is a 501(c)(3) national professional and scientific organization representing the interests of more than 30,000 African American physicians and the patients they serve. NMA is committed to improving the quality of health among minorities and disadvantaged people through its membership, professional development, community health education, advocacy, research and partnerships with federal and private agencies.

African Methodist Episcopal Church
The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church is the first major religious denomination in the Western world that originated from sociological rather than theological beliefs and differences. It developed from a congregation formed by a group of Philadelphia-area slaves and former slaves who withdrew in 1787 from St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia because of discrimination. Since its inception, the AME church has grown to include 20 Episcopal Districts and 7,000 congregations in more than 30 nations in North and South America, Africa, and Europe. The AME Church strives to fulfill its mission “to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and environmental needs of all people by spreading Christ’s liberating gospel through word and deed.” The Connectional Health Commission of the AME Church is responsible for all of the church’s education and programming related to health. The principal aims of the Commission are:

• To promote health as a part of our faith and to care for our congregations.
• To empower our congregations to advocate for improved access to affordable health care for all.
• To provide health education and identify health resources.
• To assist with first aid for Connectional Meetings as needed.
• To collaborate with Ecumenical Health Projects.

For more information, please visit www.amechealth.org.
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Most people can’t tell they have high blood pressure. That’s why it’s so important to get checked out. Once you “know your numbers,” you can begin working to make changes.

This booklet and DVD will help you learn about high blood pressure. You’ll see how you can take steps to help control it and lower your risk of heart attack and stroke.

The keys are to:

- Follow a healthy lifestyle
- See your doctor
- Take medications as prescribed
- Get your blood pressure checked regularly

Featuring Yolanda Adams