

**THERE'S  
SOMETHING  
SPECIAL  
ABOUT THE  
HEALTH OF**

the  
**AFRICAN  
AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY**

## Protect yourself from high blood pressure, the silent killer

Uncontrolled high blood pressure — also called hypertension — can lead to stroke, heart attack, and heart and kidney failure. Because symptoms of hypertension are rare, many Americans have it for years without knowing it. This absence of symptoms has given hypertension the nickname: the silent killer.

Hypertension is blood pressure of 140/90 or higher for an extended period. It affects an estimated 40 percent of African Americans, which is high compared with other races. African Americans are also more likely to develop a more severe form of high blood pressure at a younger age. Doctors aren't sure why this happens, but general risk factors include:

- high-salt diet;
- alcohol consumption;
- high cholesterol;
- sedentary lifestyle;
- being overweight or obese.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE YOUR RISK:

- **Get checked.** Because hypertension rarely shows any signs, have your blood pressure checked regularly, even if you feel fine. Blood pressure machines are often available at pharmacies or department stores.
- **To reduce your risk, you should make the following changes:**
  - lose or control your weight;
  - quit smoking;
  - limit alcohol intake;
  - avoid adding salt to food or using extra hot sauce;
  - avoid snacking on potato chips, corn chips, or buttered popcorn.
- **Work with your doctor.** If lifestyle changes alone don't help, your doctor may prescribe medicine. The medication may not make you feel any different, but continue to take it until your doctor tells you otherwise.

**Independence Blue Cross members can also call a Health Coach at 1-800-ASK-BLUE (1-800-275-2583), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for information about many common health issues. It's just one more way we're here for you every step of the way.**



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