

Title: What should I know about my blood pressure?

Author: Angelene Mellick

Date: September 12, 2008

Key words: Hypertension, Blood pressure

Abstract: Hypertension is a very prevalent disease in the United States and if untreated can cause damage throughout the body. There are good treatments that can lower blood pressure and decrease the risks of damage caused by high blood pressure.

WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure is the force of blood in the vessels in the body. There are two numbers that are recorded when someone takes your blood pressure. The top number is called the *systolic pressure*. Systolic pressure is pressure your heart uses to pump blood throughout the body. The second number is called the *diastolic pressure*. Diastolic pressure is pressure in your blood vessels when your heart is at rest between beats.

HOW IS BLOOD PRESSURE MEASURED?

Testing your blood pressure is fast and painless. It is done with a machine called a sphygmomanometer (pronounced sfig'-mo-ma-nom-e-ter). You can have it tested at the doctor's office. Electronic blood pressure monitors can also be purchased at drug stores for taking your blood pressure at home.

Tips to get accurate measurements:

- Rest for 5 minutes before taking your blood pressure
- Sit quietly with your feet uncrossed
- Do not smoke, drink caffeine or exercise for 30 minutes before taking your blood pressure

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ④ **DASH Diet**
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/introduction.html>
- ④ **National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute**
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/index.html>
- ④ **American Academy of Family Physicians**
<http://www.familydoctor.org>
- ④ **American Heart Association**
<http://www.americanheart.org>
- ④ **Medline Plus**
<http://medlineplus.gov/>



Designed by Angelene Mellick
University of Minnesota Medical School
Third Year Medical Student

What Should I Know About My Blood Pressure?



HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE = HYPERTENSION

High blood pressure is a common adult illness. In the United States, approximately 30% of adults have been diagnosed with hypertension. It is important to check it regularly because it does not show symptoms until damage has been done. It is a lifelong disease that can cause many problems if not treated. The good news is that there are easy ways to check for high blood pressure and good ways to control it.

WHAT IS HYPERTENSION?

Normal blood pressure is a top number (*systolic*) less than 140 and a bottom number (*diastolic*) less than 90. You have hypertension if your top number (systolic) is more than 140 or your bottom number (diastolic) is more than 90. Readings from 2 or more visits to the doctor's office are needed to diagnose hypertension.

What Do The Numbers Mean?		
	Systolic	Diastolic
Normal Blood Pressure	Less than 140	Less than 90
Hypertension	Greater than 140	Greater than 90

HOW DOES HYPERTENSION AFFECT YOUR HEALTH?



- **Brain:** High blood pressure weakens the vessels in the brain and increases the risk of strokes.

- **Heart:** Hypertension increases your risk for heart attack and congestive heart failure.



- **Kidneys:** The kidneys' job is to filter the blood and the increased pressure can damage the vessels in the kidney. Over time, the pressure can lead to kidney failure and require dialysis.

- **Arteries:** Hypertension puts increased pressure on arteries. This pressure causes damage to blood vessels throughout the body.

TREATMENT

Nutrition: A diet low in salt with lots of vegetables and whole grains helps reduce blood pressure. The Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension or *DASH Diet* is a good nutritional guideline to help decrease blood pressure.



Physical activity: Walking or other exercise for 30 minutes, 3-5 times per week can help reduce blood pressure. Weight loss can have a major impact on blood pressure and decrease work on your heart. For some people, weight loss and activity can decrease the need for medications.



Medications: There are many medications to treat high blood pressure. Medications can decrease the harmful effects of the disease. Your doctor can help you decide if a medication is necessary.



Talk with your doctor before starting any diet or exercise plan. Only you and your doctor can decide what treatment plan is best for you.