

# **Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary**

**Title:** Controlling blood pressure will protect your kidneys

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## **Plain Language Summary:**

### **What is blood pressure?**

Blood pressure is the amount of force that your blood pushes against your arteries. When you have high blood pressure, the force that is pushing against your arteries is too high. Each time your heart beats, it's pushing out blood into your arteries. This type of blood pressure is called systolic pressure. When your heart is at rest between beats, blood is no longer being pumped from your heart into your arteries and so the force against your arteries also falls. This is called diastolic pressure.

You may recall that each time a doctor or nurse measures your blood pressure, they give you two numbers. The numbers are the systolic and diastolic pressure and usually the systolic pressure is written above the diastolic pressure. This may appear as 120/80. 120 is the systolic pressure. 80 is the diastolic pressure.

### **What is high blood pressure?**

As of today, 120/80 is normal. 120-139/80-89 is almost high. 140/90 or higher is high.

People do not know they have high blood pressure until it makes you feel sick. High blood pressure thickens the walls in your arteries. Thick arteries can lead to strokes, heart attacks, and kidney failure.

### **High blood pressure can lead to kidney disease**

People with high blood pressure can make their kidneys sick. Sometimes, the kidneys can completely stop working. We do not know why but Black people have kidney disease more than other people. Many people with kidney disease do not know they have it until the disease is bad. When your kidneys become sick, you may start to feel tired, have swelling of the legs, feel like you want to throw up, and be confused.

### **How do you treat kidney disease from high blood pressure?**

The best way to prevent kidneys from being sick is to control blood pressure. You can help blood pressure with better food, weight loss, and medicine. Many doctors have studied kidney disease. As of now, we do not think that blood pressure lower than 130/80 helps kidneys get better. Some doctors followed about 1000 Black patients for 8-12 years and looked to see if blood pressure lower than 130/80 helps slow or stop kidneys disease. The doctors learned that blood pressure much lower than 130/80 may only help people with already bad, leaky kidneys. For everyone else, we do not know if blood pressure below 130/80mm Hg helps slows kidneys disease. If you try too hard to lower your blood pressure, you might run into the side-effects of your medicine. Your doctor

will help you figure out the best way to lower your blood pressure. Of course, more research is needed to fully understand how to best treat kidney disease.

**Additional Resources:**

How to lower blood pressure. <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/>

Kidney disease. <http://www.nkdep.nih.gov/professionals/index.htm>

**Key Words:**

Hypertension

Blood Pressure

Kidney Disease

Black Patients

African Americans

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