

Controlling Your High Blood Pressure

There is a medical test that has changed very little over the years, takes only a minute to do, and yet reveals some very important facts about the human body.
It's a blood pressure check.

Measuring blood pressure is a simple process, but it can uncover one of the most threatening health conditions in America today, hypertension, or as it's more commonly known, high blood pressure.

Dr. Ralph Sacco, past president of The American Heart Association and Chairman of the Department of Neurology at the Miller School of Medicine, at the University of Miami, says he is not only concerned about how common high blood pressure is, but also about its consequences.

"I think we need to recognize that high blood pressure is considered a silent killer, there are many people that don't know their numbers or don't know if their blood pressure is elevated."

"And high blood pressure in particular increases the risk of stroke, and of heart failure."

Dr. Lawrence Fine, Chief of the Clinical Applications and Prevention Branch at the National Heart, Lung, Blood Institute, sees high blood pressure as one of the leading health and wellness concerns of our time.

Though high blood pressure is a growing concern, blood pressure itself of course is a good thing.

It's literally the pressure that pushes blood from the heart out to the muscles, organs, and all other parts of the body.

"Blood pressure is crucial for all of us, if it's too low we're not getting enough blood and oxygen to the body. If it's too high it can lead to injury to the arteries in the body."

Although there are many causes of high blood pressure, there is typically one result that occurs, the heart has to pump harder against the higher pressure.

And as that happens, damage can occur to the heart itself and also inside the artery walls as blood is pumped at higher pressures than normal.

As the arteries become more and more damaged, blood flow can become restricted, leading to a reduced amount of blood in crucial areas of the body such as the brain and kidneys, creating potential life-threatening conditions.

The pressure readings on the blood pressure gage represent two different areas of pressure, systolic and diastolic.

Systolic pressure occurs when the heart contracts.

Diastolic pressure takes place as the heart relaxes between beats.

Systolic pressure is the higher number of the two.

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In the best possible blood pressure measurement, the systolic number would be less than 130 with the diastolic number less than 80.

“Just as you may get on a scale and weigh yourself, we want you to know your blood pressure and know what ranges you should be in.”

“Hypertension really means that the blood vessels are under increased stress, because the pressure that’s needed to circulate blood to the vital organs is higher than it should be.”

Dr. Elizabeth Ross, a cardiologist in Washington, DC, says that high blood pressure plays a huge role in her work with patients.

“Both men and women are at risk for hypertension. Women tend to live longer than men and as we age, we’re more likely to develop hypertension.”

Colleen Blessing lives in Fairfax, Virginia. A few years ago, Colleen began having problems with an irregular heartbeat, and went to her doctor to have it checked out.

“They figured out that I had PVC’s, premature ventricular contractions. And that’s when I thought I should probably get a cardiologist. So I started seeing Dr. Ross.”

“I’ve cared for Miss Blessing for a long time, we started out dealing with some rhythm problems. As she got older, her blood pressure tended to go up. We know as people get older they’re more likely to develop hypertension. We also know that hypertension runs in families, so that if you have family members who have had hypertension such as your parents, you’re more at risk for hypertension.”

High blood pressure is divided into two types - Primary (also called essential high blood pressure) and Secondary high blood pressure.

Primary high blood pressure has no clear cause, and may be linked to genetics, poor diet, medications, lack of exercise, and obesity.

Secondary high blood pressure is caused by some other existing medical condition which may be affecting the kidneys, heart or endocrine system, which is a system of glands that secrete hormones into the bloodstream.

High blood pressure during pregnancy is also considered a type of secondary high blood pressure.