

Life's Simple 7: Manage Blood Pressure

Hi, I'm Allen. Let's talk about what it takes to get your blood pressure numbers where they need to be, and why it's so important. I was first diagnosed with high blood pressure when I was 24-years-old, right after college. But it took a shake up to get my attention.

When my son was born, my perspective on life suddenly changed. I decided there were several things I needed to get in order, if I was going to be the dad I wanted to be. So I scheduled a visit with my doctor for a long overdue checkup, just in case. I was shocked when I learned that I had high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Me? Wow. I had no idea I was at risk. I thought I was young and healthy but when reality set in, I knew I needed to make some changes. 'Okay' I said to myself. If I'm not as healthy as I thought, what can I do to make it better?

That was a wakeup call for me.

And I'm committed to living a healthier life. And as a dad, I plan to be healthy long enough to invest in my son's grandkids. So here's the good news. High blood pressure is manageable and you can do it. When you take steps to improve your blood pressure, you are dramatically increasing your chances for living well. I'm 35 now, and I've managed to keep my numbers in the excellent range for the last 10 years.

So if you're ready to embrace a life free from heart disease and stroke, one of the best strategies is to keep your blood pressure numbers in the excellent range. Why all the pressure to keep my numbers in check?

Now here's what happens when your blood pressure is high, the blood running through your arteries flows with too much force and puts pressure on your arteries, stretching them past their healthy limits, causing microscopic tears. Our body then kicks into injury/healing mode, to repair these tears with scar tissue.

But unfortunately the scar tissue traps plaque and white blood cells, which can form into blockages, blood clots and hardened-weakened arteries. Blockages and blood clots mean less blood can get to our vital organs. And without blood the tissue dies. That's why high blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart attack, kidney failure, and even heart failure.

So to keep your blood pressure numbers in the excellent range, you need a plan. The first step is to know your numbers.

To fully understand your health, let the numbers tell the story. And keep track of what's happening. Never judge your blood pressure by how you feel or best guess. High blood pressure has no obvious symptoms until serious damage is well underway.

And no one can afford to ignore blood pressure. It's a problem for one out of three American adults.

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And many of those affected are not even aware.

You can check it yourself for free today in a local pharmacy. Just do it. If your numbers are normal, less than 120 for your systolic number and less than 80 for your diastolic number, then you're in the excellent range. The second step is to plan for success by staying informed.

Work with your healthcare provider to determine your best action plan. Even if your numbers are higher than ideal, you can plan for a healthier future. Because many factors are in your control.

And kids can also develop high blood pressure too. So we make sure to check with our kid's pediatrician every year. So far, so good. You can also stay informed with American Heart Association's HBP website and newsletters each month. The third key is to improve your life with diet and exercise.

Our whole family is committed to staying physically active and eating well. We hope our kids are learning good habits they'll use for life.

It's amazing how small steps like paying attention to factors as simple as blood pressure can a long way toward guaranteeing you a lifetime of better health. I've made this choice for myself and I feel good knowing I'm investing in my own future. And my family's too.

So I'm committed. Join me in making healthy choices to live better.