

# Take high blood pressure seriously, before it takes you. **Seriously.**

*This information is provided courtesy of BCBS of MN and the American Heart Association.*

**Know** your numbers. **Your Life** Depends on it.

A heartbeat. It's the sound of well-being.  
A comforting sound.  
A sound you take for granted.

You might think your steady, even heartbeat means that you're protected from high blood pressure. But don't believe everything you hear. Unless you have your blood pressure checked, you can't be sure you're safe from this *silent* killer.

Untreated high blood pressure (hypertension) can lead to heart attack, stroke or kidney failure – devastating illnesses that reduce your quality of life, or take your life completely. Even a mild elevation over time can damage your health.

## **Human Plumbing 101**

A pump provides pressure to move or circulate liquid. In your body, your heart is the pump. When your circulatory system is healthy, the heart expands and contracts (beats) to pump blood, starting at the large arteries close to the heart.

Moving out into the body, blood flows into smaller arteries, called arterioles, then to smaller vessels called capillaries. They supply oxygen-rich, nutrient-rich blood to all of your organs.

Danger develops when your arteries become narrower or less flexible, restricting the amount of blood flowing through them. The heart works harder and harder to get blood to the distant capillaries. Over time, the blood supply to the kidneys and brain may be reduced, enough to damage those vital organs. Kidney disease and stroke can occur, and the heart itself is overworked.

But high blood pressure usually has no symptoms. That's why you need to have it checked.

## **KNOW YOUR NUMBERS**

Your blood pressure is expressed in two numbers. The top (or systolic) number is the pressure when your heart beats. The bottom (or diastolic) number is the pressure between heartbeats. A normal reading – for example, 120 over 80 – tells you that your heart is pumping blood to your body at a healthy rate.

*A reading of 140/90 or higher means you're on a dangerous path and need help from your doctor, soon.*

A test for high blood pressure takes about a minute at your doctor's office, a drugstore or any facility with a self-testing machine. When you're finished, you'll know your numbers.

If they're 140/90 or higher, take action - - high blood pressure is treatable and controllable. Lifestyle changes, a doctor's care and prescription drugs can help you get your numbers down.

*About 90 to 95 percent of high blood pressure cases have no known cause, making it hard to predict who might develop it.*

Many people assume that nervous, tense or "high strung" people have high blood pressure. That's not necessarily true. Calm people can have high blood pressure, too.

People of all ages are affected, but high blood pressure most often occurs after age 35. If you're in one of these higher-risk groups, have your blood pressure checked often:

- African Americans over age 18
- Overweight people or smokers
- People with diabetes or with high blood pressure or heart disease in their families.

In addition, women who take birth control pills should be watchful. Pregnant women may have a temporary but dangerous type of high blood pressure that requires a doctor's care.

## Take Care and Take Charge

Because medical science can't say exactly why high blood pressure occurs in most cases, it's hard to say what might prevent it. But there are a few things you can do to control some of your risk factors:

- Maintain your ideal weight
- Eat a low-fat, low cholesterol diet to keep arteries free of fat build-up
- Get active. Improve your heart health
- Limit salt and alcohol – and don't smoke
- Control stress and find time to relax

Keep a healthy attitude - - the relatively small inconvenience of treatment is still much better than kidney disease, stroke or a heart attack. Be sure to give any prescribed medicine a chance to work. Don't go from doctor to doctor looking for an easy answer. Report side effects of any drugs right away.

*Your heart will thank you for it.*

You may need more than one blood pressure test to really know your numbers. Have it taken several times over several days to weeks. Follow up with your doctor as described in the chart below.

**Know** *your* numbers.

### Blood Pressure Record

*Keep this as a record card to review with your doctor.*

Date	Time	Top # Systolic	Bottom # Diastolic
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
Average			

### How often should I have my blood pressure checked?

Top # Systolic		Bottom # Diastolic	Follow-up recommended*
Less than 120	<i>And</i>	Less than 80	Recheck in 2 years
Less than 130	<i>And</i>	Less than 85	Recheck in 2 years
130 to 139	<i>And</i>	85 to 89	Recheck in 1 year
140 to 159	<i>Or</i>	90 to 99	Confirm within 2 months
160 to 179	<i>Or</i>	100 to 109	Evaluate within 1 month
180 or higher	<i>Or</i>	110 or higher	Evaluate immediately

- If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, diabetes, congestive heart failure, certain kidney problems or other medical problems, follow your doctor's recommendations.

## **Heart Attack Warning Signs**

Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back.

Pain that spreads to the shoulders, neck or arms.

Chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

## **Stroke Warning Signs**

Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.

Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding

Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes

Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.

Sudden severe headache with no known cause

*Don't wait if you experience any of these warning signs. Even if only some are present, get help immediately. A heart attack or stroke is a medical emergency. Call 911.*