



## **Understanding Hypertension**

What do you know about hypertension, often referred to as high blood pressure?



It is common, yet not to be taken lightly. With hypertension, the pressure in your arteries becomes high enough that over time it can, and often does, cause serious and even life-threatening damage. It can be frighteningly sneaky, causing significant damage before any symptoms are noticed.

To understand blood pressure, think of a simple garden hose. When it has a lot of water flowing quickly through, you can feel the pressure just by touching the hose. When there is just a trickle going through, you can feel the hose relax. Our veins respond much the same way. Instead of a steady flow, like water through a hose, our veins experience a higher pressure with each heartbeat and a lower pressure between heartbeats. As we age, our vessels tend to get a bit tighter, less stretchy. That is backwards from what occurs to other parts of our body with aging, but that is a different article entirely. Anyway, tighter vessels mean higher pressures.

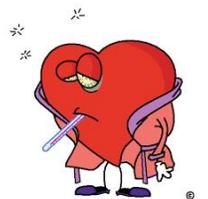
There are many other reasons a person's blood pressure can rise. Obstructive sleep apnea, alcohol abuse, stress, genetics, certain medications, thyroid problems and weight gain are just a few situations that could cause hypertension. Sometimes correcting the cause is a cure, but sometimes blood pressure medications are necessary to maintain healthy pressures.



120/80 is considered a healthy blood pressure. Your blood pressure is constantly adjusting but it is optimal to maintain it around those numbers or even lower. The 120 represents the amount of pressure that occurs with each heartbeat and the 80 represents the amount of pressure during that tiny little rest between heartbeats.

When the cuff is squeezed around your arm and a nurse is listening to your vessel, do you ever wonder what that is about? Well, when the cuff squeezes hard enough finally it occludes the flow of blood through your artery and so no heartbeat is heard. As the cuff begins to relax, the nurse watches the dial and when the pressure in your artery is high enough to push through the squeezing action of the cuff, your pulse becomes audible again. That marks that top number of your blood pressure. As the cuff relaxes even more, the blood is flowing more gently and the heartbeat isn't even heard. That marks the bottom pressure number. Both numbers are important. If the numbers are rising for you, please see your medical provider for advice.

Hypertension became a bit more personal to me recently. After trying to ignore the fact that my previously low pressures were creeping up, I experienced a few unexplained dizzy spells. Eventually, I had a day when it shot up into a range where I was in danger of a stroke. I couldn't believe it! Although hypertension often occurs with no symptoms at all, I could feel the pressure in my head and I felt somewhat unwell. I knew I had moved into a high risk category and I wasn't up for that kind of drama. I made an appointment and received a prescription to control my blood pressure.



I really want to stress how important regular medical check-ups can be for taking good care of your blood pressure and taking care of the body God gave you. Additionally, you can purchase an automatic blood pressure cuff to use in your home or stop at one of those public blood pressure machines. Also, we are going to begin having blood pressure checks after services from time to time as well so watch your bulletins for those announcements. If you are trained to take blood pressures and want to help with that, please let me know.

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