

## Understanding Your Blood Pressure

What is blood pressure? Blood pressure is the force of your blood against the walls of your arteries. Blood pressure consists of two number; a top and bottom number. The top number is the systolic pressure. The bottom number is the diastolic pressure.

Systolic blood pressure is the force of blood in your arteries as your heart beats. If your systolic number is higher than one hundred and forty you have high blood pressure. Even if your diastolic number is not high you can still have 'isolated systolic hypertension.' This means only your systolic number is high.

This is more common for older Americans. This pressure usually increases with age whereas diastolic pressure decreases after fifty-five. You might not know if you have isolated systolic hypertension so ask your doctor if you are concerned.

Diastolic blood pressure is the force of blood in your arteries when your heart relaxes between beats. For younger people this is a very important number. The higher this pressure is the more you are at risk. This blood pressure lowers as you get older and your systolic increases. Therefore diastolic is more important in younger people and systolic in older.

Normal blood pressure is less than one hundred and twenty over less than eighty. If your pressure is between the normal numbers and one hundred and thirty-nine over eighty-nine, you have what is called prehypertension. This puts you at risk to develop high blood pressure in the future but it easily preventable.

Hypertension is a name for high blood pressure. Having high blood pressure puts you at risk for heart disease or even strokes. High blood pressure makes your heart work harder than it should and can lead to blindness, kidney disease and even congestive heart failure.

According to statistics high blood pressure killed over fifty-four thousand people in 2004. Statistics also show that twenty-eight percent of people have high blood pressure and aren't even aware of it. Are you one of them?

You should be aware of the risks of high blood pressure so you can avoid them as best as you can. High blood pressure is a risk for stroke and heart disease. While some risks can be altered or fixed, some cannot. For instance if you use tobacco or are overweight you are at risk for high blood pressure.

You can easily fix this by trying to quit using tobacco and watching your diet

to help lose weight. If you have trouble doing either of these on your own, consult your physician. They may be able to prescribe you something or give you useful information to help.

High blood pressure can affect certain parts of your body as well. You might suffer from a stroke. This happens because the high blood pressure can break a weak blood vessel leaving it to bleed into the brain. Also if you have a blood clot blocking a narrow artery, you can also experience a stroke.

Sometimes impaired vision or blindness can occur from high blood pressure. It might eventually cause your blood vessels in your eye to bleed or burst leaving you with blurred or impaired vision.

Your arteries harden as you age, even more so for those in your heart, brain and kidneys. These harder arteries are associated with high blood pressure. When this happens your kidneys and heart have to work harder.

If you have any questions or concerns about your blood pressure ask your doctor. They can answer any questions you might have and find a solution if you do in fact have high blood pressure or might be prone to it. It's never too late to take care of your body, including your blood pressure.