



McHenry County Department of Health

“Working to prevent disease and promote health and safety
for all people of McHenry County since 1966”



Know your Blood Pressure

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What is blood pressure and what do the blood pressure numbers mean?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against blood vessel walls. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury and is recorded as two numbers such as 120/80 mm Hg. The top number (systolic) measures the force of the blood when the heart is actively pumping. The bottom number (diastolic) measures the amount of pressure when the heart is resting or between beats. Blood pressure readings can fluctuate depending on the situation and rise and fall throughout the day. High blood pressure (hypertension) occurs when blood pressure measurements are higher than recommended for two separate readings on several occasions.

The guideline for blood pressure is reflected in the following chart:

	Blood pressure levels
Normal	Systolic: less than 120 mm Hg Diastolic: less than 80 mm Hg
At risk (prehypertension)	Systolic: 120-139 mm Hg Diastolic: 80-89 mm Hg
High (hypertension)	Systolic: 140 mm Hg or higher Diastolic: 90 mm Hg or higher

What are the signs and symptoms of high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is often called “the silent killer” because many people don’t know they have it until they have their blood pressure checked.

What are the risks associated with uncontrolled high blood pressure?

Over time, high blood pressure can cause stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney failure, peripheral arterial disease and blindness. According to the Centers for Disease Control, hypertension accounts for 45% of all deaths from cardiovascular disease. Lowering systolic blood pressure by 10 mm Hg and diastolic by 5 mm Hg can lower the risk of stroke by approximately 40% and lower the risk of heart disease by 20-25%.

What are some ways to control high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is very common. The CDC states that approximately 1 out of 3 adults have hypertension and less than half of adults have their blood pressure controlled. The first step in controlling blood pressure is to have it checked regularly and know what your numbers are. Websites to record blood pressure numbers are heart360.org and cardiosmart.org.

The following lifestyle changes can help to control and prevent high blood pressure:

Maintain a healthy weight. The CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/> can help to determine healthy weight and also has tips on losing and maintaining weight.

Eat a healthy diet. A heart healthy diet is low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars. In addition, increasing intake of fruits and vegetables is helpful in decreasing high blood pressure. Research shows that the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) can decrease high blood pressure. Click here for information on the DASH diet: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/new_dash.pdf

Limit alcohol use. Women should limit alcohol intake to no more than one drink per day and men to no more than two drinks per day.

Be physically active. Engage in regular aerobic physical activity (such as brisk walking) at least 30 minutes per day most days of the week.

Lower intake of sodium. Sodium increases blood pressure by holding excess fluid in your blood vessels and tissues. The CDC states that sodium intake for the average American is 3400 mg/day. Eighty percent of sodium intake is in restaurant or processed foods.

The recommended daily sodium intake is:

-1500 mg for people with high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, African Americans and adults over age 51.

-Less than 2300 for all other healthy adults.

Don't smoke. Smoking can injure blood vessels and speed up hardening of the arteries. Exposure to second hand smoke should also be avoided. For information on smoking cessation, call the Tobacco Quit Line at 847-620-7600.

Prevent or manage diabetes. Maintaining a healthy weight and diet in addition to being physically active will help to manage both diabetes and high blood pressure. When an individual has both high blood pressure and diabetes, the risk for kidney disease and kidney failure is increased.

Reduce stress. Take time to relax. Sit quietly for 10-15 minutes, take slow deep breaths and think peaceful thoughts. When possible, learn to say no to activities that can make your day too busy. Avoid negative thoughts by positive self talk. Find time to do something you enjoy every day.

Take medications as prescribed. In addition to lifestyle changes, your doctor may prescribe medication to help lower your blood pressure. If you have side effects or don't feel well after taking your medication, call your doctor-don't just stop taking the medications. Keep a record of your blood pressure readings and write down questions you may have for your visits to the doctor. Never stop taking the medication on your own-always discuss this with your doctor

For more information on blood pressure visit the following websites:

American Heart Association

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention:

http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/what_you_can_do.htm

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Make Healthy Living a Part of Your Life

www.mcdh.info

815-334-4510