

Blood Pressure Tip Sheet



High Blood Pressure (hypertension) is one of the most common and dangerous illnesses in the U.S. today. It generally has no warning symptoms and is a major risk factor for heart disease. If not controlled, high blood pressure can lead to increased risk of **Stroke, Heart Attack, Heart Failure, Kidney Failure** and **Blindness**.

What is Blood Pressure?

Everybody has blood pressure. If we didn't, blood would be unable to move through our bodies. The heart works non-stop as a pump, pushing blood under pressure through a long and complex network of blood vessels. The force of that blood pushing against the vessel walls is called blood pressure.

What is High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure is a condition in which blood pressure goes up too high and stays there. It is normal for pressure to go up and down throughout the day depending on activities and emotions. Although the word "hypertension" is often assumed to refer to nervousness and anxiety, it has nothing at all to do with personality or being "hyper". High blood pressure and hypertension are the very same thing. Both relaxed and excitable people can have hypertension.

What is a Normal Blood Pressure for Me?

There is no one blood pressure that is "normal" for everyone. Day-to-day activities, age, and overall health can all make a difference in what is "normal" for you. A blood pressure reading is made up of two numbers. The first and higher number is the *systolic* pressure, which shows the pressure in the arteries as the heart squeezes to pump blood. The *diastolic* pressure is the pressure in the arteries when the heart relaxes to fill with blood. The second and lower of the two numbers is the pressure when the heart rests between beats. The Wisconsin Division of Health and the American Heart Association, Wisconsin Affiliate, recommend the following guidelines for "adult resting blood pressure". Diagnosis of hypertension is made by a doctor when a series of readings are consistently above the normal levels shown in the table below.

Adult Guidelines for Blood Pressure

AGE	BLOOD PRESSURE		RISK CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
	SYSTOLIC	DIASTOLIC		
All Adults 18+	less than 120	less than 80	Normal	Recheck in 2 years*
All Adults 18+	130 - 139	80 - 89	Prehypertensive	Recheck in 1 year*
All Adults 18+	140 - 159	90 - 99	Stage 1 Hypertension	Recheck in 3-30 days**†
All Adults 18+	at or above 160	at or above 100	Stage 2 Hypertension	Recheck in 3-30 days**†

* Recheck in 3 months if you have a history of high blood pressure.

** If blood pressure is normal on second screening, obtain a third screening in 3-30 days.

† See "Things You Can Change" on opposite side of this flyer.

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What Can I Do to Control or Prevent High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure is not curable, but it is controllable. Your own lifestyle has a great deal to do with its prevention and control. Some lifestyle factors are changeable, while some are not.

Things You Can't Change

Age: Statistics show that older people are more likely to develop high blood pressure. This should not be considered an expected result of aging in every individual however, and still needs to be treated and prevented.

Race: High blood pressure occurs at different rates among various populations. In the U.S., the African-American population is at greatest risk for hypertension, where it also tends to occur earlier and be more severe.

Heredity: If high blood pressure has been a part of your family history, then you are at greater risk of developing it yourself and should take steps to reduce your level of risk and try to prevent it.

Sex: In general, men tend to experience high blood pressure more often than women. After menopause, however, the rate for women increases and can become greater than the rate for men. Pregnancy and/or the use of oral contraceptives may also increase a woman's risk for high blood pressure.

Things You CAN Change

Weight: Being overweight increases the risk of high blood pressure. SAFE dieting that includes eating less salt (sodium) and fat has proven to be very helpful in the prevention and control of hypertension. Read food labels and become aware of what is in the foods you eat.

Physical Activity: Being physically active is important for keeping your heart muscle in shape. Physical activity provides more oxygen to the blood stream, and helps keep weight, cholesterol, blood pressure and stress levels under control. Moderate activity (walking, yard work) totaling 30 minutes a day, most days of the week, is recommended for good heart health.

Tobacco Use: Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease. Nicotine and other products in tobacco steal oxygen away from red blood cells, narrow and damage blood vessel walls, and cause blood pressure to go up. The same is true for smokeless products. One pack of cigarettes per day adds an increased workload on the heart equivalent to an additional 50-75 pounds of body weight.

Stress: Everybody reacts a little differently to stress. Too much negative stress (distress) over a long period of time may contribute to elevated blood pressure. The use of relaxation techniques or participation in an activity you enjoy can help to minimize the effects of emotional stress and keep your blood pressure down. Always try to keep a balance between the good and bad stress in your life.

Alcohol: Besides a risk of dependency, regular use of alcohol can narrow blood vessel walls and result in elevation of blood pressure. Alcohol contains many calories but little or no nutritional value. As a result, alcohol is not recommended for a person trying to lose weight or control his/her blood pressure.

Medication: Many people are able to manage elevated blood pressure by making changes in their lifestyle. Other people may need medication to control their high blood pressure. Medication should be taken regularly under the direction of your physician to insure that it is doing the job. Consumers should also be aware of over-the-counter products that may elevate blood pressures, such as antihistamines and cold formulas. Read product labels and consult your doctor or pharmacist if you are not certain about the possible effects of a medication.



For additional information, contact the Cardiovascular Risk Reduction Program at 286-8828.

The City of Milwaukee Health Department does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability. Persons needing disability assistance information, language assistance, or interpreter services call 286-3524 or (TTY) 286-2025.