

Understanding the Silent Killer: High Blood Pressure

An elevated blood pressure can lead to the development of heart disease, stroke and heart failure. There are usually no symptoms and for this reason high blood pressure is considered a “silent killer” as individuals who suffer from it often don’t realize that a problem exists. As your blood pressure increases, so too does your risk for illness.

Blood pressure is the force applied to the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps blood through the body. Your blood pressure reading is made up of two numbers. The systolic or “top” number is the pressure when the heart is pumping blood, and the diastolic or “bottom” number is the pressure when the heart relaxes. Blood pressure constantly changes depending on activity, temperature, diet, emotional state, posture, stress, physical state and medication use.

WHAT ARE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE NUMBERS?		
SYSTOLIC <i>(Top Number)</i> <i>(in mmHg)</i>	DIASTOLIC <i>(Bottom Number)</i> <i>(in mmHg)</i>	CLASSIFICATION
Less than 120	Less than 80	Normal
120-139	80-90	Pre-hypertension
140-159	90-99	Stage 1 Hypertension
Greater than 160	Greater than 100	Stage 2 Hypertension
Greater than 180	Greater than 110	Severe Hypertension

Having high blood pressure is very much like having too much pressure in a water hose. If you turn the water on halfway, the hose is still soft and pliable, but water is still flowing; this represents the diastolic pressure number while your heart is at rest. When you turn the water on full, the hose becomes firm as the water rushes through quickly. This is your systolic pressure, the highest number of the two pressure readings. If you alternate turning the water hose on high (systolic) and then halfway (diastolic) over and over again, you get an idea of how blood pressure normally works. If your blood pressure becomes consistently high with too much pressure, it can cause damage to your blood vessels, heart and kidneys. Just like the damage that can occur if pressure builds inside the hose.

Keep your blood pressure flowing smoothly:

- Take a few minutes and get your blood pressure checked routinely. It could save your life.
- Talk with your health care provider to learn where your blood pressure levels should be and how to reach or maintain the healthiest numbers for you.
- Take steps to improving your blood pressure by eating better, managing stress and moving more.

Which of the following lifestyle changes can effectively help control elevated BP levels? *(Answer below.)*

- A. Daily physical activity
- B. Decreased salt consumption
- C. Meditation
- D. Weight control
- E. Stress
- F. All of the above

ANSWER is F: To effectively keep BP numbers under control; exercise *daily*, reduce salt consumption, perform some type of stress management routine, and control your waist line.

Reducing Your Risk for Hypertension

Hypertension Resources for Members

- **Receive Lifestyle Returns Credit - Call Blues On Call™ at 1-888-BLUE(2583)-428 anytime 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for confidential support from a specially-trained Health Coach.** Our Health Coaches have access to a variety of resources to assist you, including health guides, educational materials and videos. Or call Member Services on the back of your health insurance ID card to learn about Member wellness services.
- **Receive Lifestyle Returns Credit - Enroll in an online wellness program.** Get a personalized plan for risk reduction by going to your Member website at www.highmarkbcbs.com. **HealthMedia Control** is an online program for Blood Pressure – develop a personalized plan to achieve and sustain a health blood pressure. **HealthMedia Achieve** – shows you how to control your cholesterol levels by making effective lifestyle changes and working in sync with your health care team.
- **Take advantage of Wellness Member Discounts.** Save up to 50% on non-covered wellness products and services from leading national companies. Save on weight management programs, fitness discounts, fitness center memberships, health coaching and more. Log in to your Member website, select the “Your Coverage” tab and go to “Member Discounts.”

Hypertension Resources Online

American Heart Association	http://www.americanheart.org
American Dietetic Association	http://www.eatright.org
National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute	http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/
National Stroke Association	http://www.stroke.org