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ASK THE NURSE
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WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE: Blood pressure is the amount of force your blood uses to go through your arteries, when your heart is pumping blood out and when it is at rest. Over time, high blood pressure weakens the walls of your arteries and increases the risk of stroke and heart attack. When blood moves around the body it puts pressure on the vessels.

Why is blood pressure sometimes referred to as a “silent killer” Blood pressure is not felt, so high blood pressure can go undetected for a long time, if not checked regularly. When left untreated, the risk of adverse events can occur, like heart attacks, strokes, aneurysm, heart & kidney failure, and clogged arteries.

Systolic blood pressure is the top number. This number shows the pressure in your arteries (arterial wall) when your heart is beating and sending blood into your arteries. Systolic readings may show risk factors for heart disease for people older than 50 years old. This could be because our arteries become stiffer, and over time plaque buildup may occur.

Diastolic blood pressure is the bottom number. It's the pressure in your arteries when your heart muscles are at rest between beats.

Risk factors: family history, age, sex, race or ethnicity, smoking, alcohol, physical inactivity, poor diet-high in sodium, low potassium, obesity, and diabetes. So, to decrease the risk factors of hypertension you should follow a heart healthy diet, increase your exercise, get help to stop smoking, decrease or stop alcohol consumption, and ensure your diabetes is under control.

Risk factors that you can't change are your age, sex, family history, genetics, race or ethnicity. If you have been diagnosed with hypertension, the physician may suggest a change in your daily habits. If those changes don't decrease the high blood pressure, medication might be recommended, which will help lower the elevated blood pressure. Consult your physician with any questions or concerns.

Unit of measure, mmHg: Blood pressure is measured in units of millimeters of mercury (mmHg). For example, when stating a person's blood pressure of 138/80 mmHg, we say 138 over 80. The systolic or top number is 138 mmHg and the diastolic blood pressure or bottom number is 80 mmHg. This number changes throughout the day, as your activity changes. If your blood pressure is consistently elevated the physician may say you have hypertension or high blood pressure.



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Per the American Heart Association's blood pressure chart:

Normal	SYSTOLIC MM Hg less than 120	and DIASTOLIC less than 80
Elevated	120-129	and less than 80
High Blood Pressure Stage 1	130-139	or 80-89
High Blood Pressure Stage 2	140 or higher	or 90 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis	Higher than 180	and/or higher than 120 (EMERGENCY)

The best way to monitor your blood pressure with a home machine is to follow these steps:

- Before taking your blood pressure, make sure you have no caffeine, alcohol, smoking or physical activity at least 30 min prior.
- Sit comfortably, feet are flat on the floor, don't cross your legs.
- Your arm resting on a flat surface, at heart level.
- Use the correct cuff size. If the cuff is too small or too large it may give you an inaccurate reading.
- It's best practice to place the cuff on bare skin, not over clothing.
- Apply cuff to appropriate site on the arm, at least 1" above the bend in the elbow
- Remain relaxed and inflate the cuff. If blood pressure needs to be repeated, wait 1-3 minutes in between readings.
- It is a good idea to monitor your blood pressure twice daily, once upon awakening before the first cup of coffee and at bedtime right before bed. Report a week's measurements to your doctor. If high blood pressure has been identified, contact your physician to report. No need to wait a week to report elevated blood pressure to your doctor. Call the doctor's office at any point if you have any questions or concerns.

When to call the doctor:

- If your blood pressure is too high (hypertension) or too low (hypotension)
- You might develop symptoms of dizziness, nausea, fainting or complaints of headache with blood pressure being too high or too low.
- In extreme cases when your blood pressure is greater than 180, you might develop chest pain, shortness of breath, vision changes, and headache. Get medical care immediately!

You can contact your physician if you have any concerns or questions about your blood pressure. Feel free to contact Gail Johnson gjohnson@westfordma.gov if you want to schedule a time to have your blood pressure checked. Remember, all blood pressure results should be given to your own personal doctor, and if elevated blood pressure is noted, follow-up should be through your physician's office. It is the responsibility of the individual to follow up with the physician if you are noted to have elevated blood pressure for further treatment.

Respectively submitted by,
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REFERENCE:

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*The information above was taken from various sources, to explain blood pressure. This information is meant to be truthful, accurate, & educational and not meant to misrepresent any article previously written and submitted. **INFORMATIONAL ONLY. NOT MEDICAL ADVICE.**