

# The Basics of Blood Pressure

by Patrick F. Romano, DO - MLHC in Summit Crossing

***For many people, understanding blood pressure and managing it isn't necessarily an easy task...so what is blood pressure, and what does it measure?***

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of the arteries. The pressure is greatest when blood is being pumped out of the heart and into the arteries, and relaxes between beats.

Often you will hear blood pressure referred to as one number "over" another number, such as 140 over 90. The "top" number, in this case 140, is the systolic pressure which refers to the pressure inside an artery when blood is being pumped out of the heart. The "bottom" number refers to the diastolic pressure, which is the pressure inside the heart when it is at rest. A healthy blood pressure for patients age 20 or older is 120 over 80.

***What's the deal with high or low blood pressure?***

High blood pressure, also referred to as hypertension, is cause for concern because it makes the heart work even harder to pump blood to the body. It can lead to heart attack or stroke, and is often the result of an unhealthy lifestyle.

"Diet and exercise are both important factors in helping to control high blood pressure," explains Dr. Romano. "One of the biggest contributors to high blood pressure is the amount of sodium in a person's diet, something that we often don't think twice about when we have the salt shaker."

In addition to a diet heavy in sodium, a lack of physical activity, chronic alcohol consumption, stress, smoking and age are all contributors to high blood pressure.

Like its alternative, low blood pressure is also important to be aware of and can also be very dangerous, with symptoms such as dizziness,

fainting, and a lack of oxygen to the heart and brain.

Typically, pregnant women and people with heart or endocrine problems are at risk for low blood pressure, but dehydration, severe allergic reactions and a lack of nutrients can all account for low blood pressure as well.

***How can I maintain a healthy blood pressure?***

"The good news about blood pressure is that it's not irreversible," says Dr. Romano. "If yours is too high or too low, you can make the necessary changes to get it back to a healthy range."

To avoid blood pressure ups and downs or get your health back on track, aim to live a healthy lifestyle by eating fruits and vegetables, lean meats, and proteins. Aim for 30 minutes of exercise per day every week, and try to limit alcohol and sodium consumption. Opt for low-sodium foods whenever possible, and try and substitute different seasonings during meals.

Also be sure to keep external lifestyle factors that might be out of your control in mind. If you're working in a stressful environment, find ways to wind down at the end of the day, whether it's through a workout, reading a book, or meditation.

**For an appointment with Dr. Romano in Summit Crossing, call 484.352.1400.**



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