



## What Does Blood Pressure Mean?

Each time your nurse or physician "takes" your blood pressure, they are recording two measurements: your systolic pressure and your diastolic pressure. If the two measurements were systolic 110 and diastolic 70, they would be written as "110/70." Your physician or nurse will describe your blood pressure as "one-ten over seventy."

A normal resting blood pressure reading is 120/80.

Your systolic pressure (the first and highest number), is the pressure or force the heart places on the walls of your blood vessels as it is working/pumping with each heartbeat.

Diastolic pressure (the second and lowest number) is the lowest pressure the blood places on the walls of your blood vessels when the heart is relaxed between beats.

Both of these measurements are important. A high systolic pressure indicates strain on the blood vessels when the heart is attempting to pump blood into your bloodstream. If your diastolic pressure is high, it means that your blood vessels have little chance to relax between heartbeats.

The only way to tell if you have high blood pressure (hypertension) is to have it checked. Occasional high blood pressure is common, especially if you are anxious, nervous, or have recently exercised. Seeing a nurse or physician may cause this response and is referred to as "white coat syndrome."

Having high blood pressure is very common. About 72 million Americans have high blood pressure. Individual with high blood pressure may not even be aware they have it because they may not have any symptoms or complaints.

People that are at risk of developing high blood pressure include: African Americans, people over age 35, individuals with diabetes, gout or kidney disease or having a family history of high blood pressure. None of the above factors can change; however, you can influence; being overweight, having a sedentary lifestyle, drinking too much alcohol, consuming too much salt and being a smoker.

Untreated sustained high blood pressure can increase your risk of stroke and heart attack. There may not be any symptoms, which is why it is referred to as the "silent killer." If your blood pressure is 140/90 or higher, you will be asked to return for a re-check. If your blood pressure remains high, your health care provider will recommend a treatment plan.

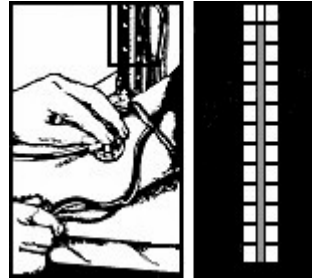
### Additional information

Please refer to the following McKinley Health Center handouts:

- Factors that Affect Blood Pressure
- Dash Diet 1500, 1800, or 2000 Calories Per Day

### Reference

What is high blood pressure? 2007. American Heart Association



Systolic produced when heart beats

Diagnostic results when heart is at rest

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>