



## Go RED for your heart -- Blood pressure basics

By Rolf Panke, DO, North Basin Medical Clinics



As a physician, I like to ask questions and truly appreciate patients who ask them. Some of the most common questions I answer are about blood pressure. Having a blood pressure check is a normal part of any doctor's visit, but what do those numbers mean to you personally? If your numbers are high, it could mean your life.

### What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against artery walls. High blood pressure is detrimental to your health because it makes your heart work harder and damages arteries and organs over time. Your doctor measures two numbers when checking your blood pressure. The first or top number – systolic – is the pressure in your arteries while your heart beats. The second or bottom number – diastolic – measures the pressure while your heart rests between beats.

### Do you have high blood pressure?

For an adult, normal blood pressure is generally around or below 120/80. You have high blood pressure (hypertension) if your blood pressure stays at or above 140/90. Folks with diabetes or kidney problems should keep blood pressure below 125/75.

### What does this mean to your health?

High blood pressure has effects throughout the body. Uncontrolled, you're at high risk for...

- Stroke
- Congestive heart failure
- Coronary heart disease
- Blindness
- Kidney problems
- Further complications of diabetes

Over 90 percent of all people with high blood pressure have "essential hypertension." This means there is no specific cause for their high blood pressure. Although there are medications available to reduce high blood pressure, they are not necessarily the first line of attack. Changing your lifestyle is. How can you do that?

- Stop smoking. Nicotine narrows blood vessels.
- Recognize and treat your diabetes if you have it.
- Increase physical activity.
- Eat a healthy diet with foods low in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. I also recommend an increase in magnesium, potassium and calcium.
- Lose weight. Being overweight forces your heart to work harder.
- Don't drink too much alcohol. An average of more than one drink a day for women or two drinks a day for men raises blood pressure significantly.
- Limit caffeine intake.
- Have regular medical checkups.
- Get plenty of rest and find ways to relieve daily tensions.

Most important, I suggest you keep in good communication with your physician. We want to know your concerns, pressures and lifestyle changes. In the big picture, it all affects your health.

To get the big picture about your cardiovascular health, Lincoln Hospital and North Basin Medical Clinics offer low cost blood tests twice a year at the annual Spring & Fall Check Up & Blood Draws. For more information on times and dates, look on our website under "Programs."

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