

This week's focus is on hypertension, otherwise known as high blood pressure. This means that as blood is pumping through your arteries (the blood vessels coming from your heart to the rest of your body), the pressure being put on the walls of the vessels is extremely high, similar to when a hose is pinched off. Blood pressure readings are given as two numbers. The top number is the systolic pressure. This is the pressure on the vessels as the heart contracts and pushes blood through the vessels. The bottom number is the diastolic pressure. This is the pressure on the vessel walls as the heart rests between beats. A normal blood pressure is 120/80.

Hypertension is a very common medical condition. Oftentimes people do not have symptoms. Left untreated, it can lead to many other health problems, such as heart attack, stroke, heart failure, atrial fibrillation, vision loss, chronic kidney disease, and dementia. Several factors increase your risk, including a high salt intake, smoking, being overweight, lack of physical activity, too much alcohol consumption, stress, being over age 40, and genetics.

Sometimes lifestyle changes are enough to lower your blood pressure. However, if it is too high, medications are needed. There are many different types of blood pressure medications. Some relax the vessels, others widen them, some slow the heart rate, and others decrease the sodium and fluid content. Sometimes more than one medication is needed to do the job. Work with your doctor to find what works best for you. Do not stop taking your medications unless a doctor tells you to.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120 – 129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130 – 139	or	80 – 89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120