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## Blood Pressure

March 2014

### What is Blood Pressure?

Blood is carried from the heart to all parts of your body in vessels called arteries. Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries.

Everybody has blood pressure. Without it, blood can't circulate through the body. And without circulating blood, vital organs can't get the oxygen and food they need to work.

### Does a person's blood pressure change during the day?

Yes, your blood pressure is at its lowest as you sleep and it rises when you get up. It also can rise when you are excited, nervous or active.

However, for most of your waking hours, your blood pressure stays pretty much the same when you are sitting or standing still.

### What do blood pressure numbers mean?

Blood pressure is often written as two numbers. The top (systolic) number represents the pressure while the heart is beating. The bottom (diastolic) number represents the pressure when the heart is resting between beats.

### What is considered high blood pressure for adults?

High blood pressure for adults is defined as either a systolic pressure of 140 mmHg or higher, or a diastolic pressure of 90 mmHg or higher.

### What is a good blood pressure for adults?

Optimal blood pressure is a systolic blood pressure less than 120 and a diastolic blood pressure less than 80.

### How Do I Know If My Blood Pressure is High?

The only way to find out if you have this disease is to have your blood pressure checked! High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. In fact, many people have this disease for years without knowing it. Having high blood pressure (hypertension) doesn't mean you're tense, nervous or hyperactive. You can be a calm, relaxed person and still have hypertension.

### What if my blood pressure reading is high today?

A single high reading doesn't mean you *have* high blood pressure, but it's a sign that you need to watch your blood pressure carefully. If you have prehypertension, or if you have a family history of high blood pressure, you're at higher risk. Your doctor will tell you how often to have it checked.

### What does it mean if my blood pressure is high?

High blood pressure can hurt your body in many ways. It adds to the workload of your heart and arteries. Because your heart works harder than normal for a long time, it tends to get bigger. A slightly bigger heart may work well, but if it's enlarged very much, it may have a hard time meeting your body's demands.

### Is high blood pressure a risk factor for other health problems?

Yes. High blood pressure is the number one modifiable risk factor for stroke. It also contributes to heart attacks, heart failure, kidney failure and atherosclerosis (fatty buildups in arteries). In some cases, it can cause blindness. High blood pressure also causes damage to the arteries, causing arterial disease.

Remember blood pressure can usually be controlled, and its effects can be prevented or reduced if it's treated and controlled early, and kept under control!

### For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County Health Department at 316-660-7300 or visit the Sedgwick County website at [www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org).