

Your Health Matters

MANAGING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

When your heart beats, it pumps blood to all parts of your body through arteries. As the blood flows, it pushes on the artery walls. This is called blood pressure. High blood pressure means the blood is pumping through your arteries with too much force.

Your blood pressure may be higher or lower at different times of the day. For example, it is usually lower when you first wake up, or when you have been sitting down for a while. It is usually higher after you exercise, or when you are under stress.

It is normal to have higher blood pressure for a short amount of time. But when your blood pressure stays high, it becomes a serious medical condition. Your doctor may call this hypertension.

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is sometimes called "the silent killer" because it has no symptoms. You may not even realize it is damaging your body and may even kill you.

But you can prevent and control high blood pressure with four steps:

1. Learn your risk.

Talk to your doctor about your family history, your health, and your lifestyle to find out if you are at risk for high blood pressure.

2. Know your numbers.

The two numbers in a blood pressure reading tell you how much force is pushing against your artery walls when your heart is squeezing and when it is resting. The top number is called the systolic number. The bottom number is called the diastolic number. A normal blood pressure is 120 over 80, or lower.

3. Know when to get emergency care.

When blood pressure gets too high, you are in danger. If the top number goes above 180, or the bottom number goes above 110, you need to call 9-1-1 immediately for an ambulance.

4. Take care of yourself.

To protect your health, you must take care of your blood pressure. You can do this by choosing a healthy lifestyle.

- Eat healthy foods and limit salt.
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.
- Stay at a weight that is healthy for you.
- Control stress and worry in your life.
- Avoid tobacco smoke, and limit how much alcohol you drink.
- Follow your doctor's instructions for any medication you take.

You will need to manage your blood pressure all your life. Remind yourself that the healthy choices you make each day help protect your heart, your body, and your life.

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Harman".

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