Understanding Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is a measurement of how hard your blood pushes against the artery walls as it moves through your body. Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers and written as a ratio. These numbers are measures of pressure in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). The top number is your systolic reading. It measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The bottom number is your diastolic reading. It measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests between beats.

Know Your Numbers

If you have high blood pressure, or a family history of the disease, it is important for you to know your blood pressure as well as the healthy and unhealthy ranges. A normal blood pressure is a systolic reading of less than 120 mm Hg, and a diastolic reading of less than 80 mm Hg.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) diagnoses high blood pressure as consistent systolic readings of 140 mm Hg or higher, or diastolic readings of 90 mm Hg or higher. A high blood pressure diagnosis may also be given for an adult (or a child age 13 or older) with consistent systolic readings of 130 to 139 mm Hg, or diastolic readings of 80 to 89 mm Hg, with other cardiovascular risk factors present.

Risk Factors

There are different types of risk factors. While age or family history can't be changed, you can control risk factors related to unhealthy lifestyle habits. The NIH lists the following common risk factors for high blood pressure:

The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have it monitored by your doctor.

Uncontrollable Risk Factors	Controllable Risk Factors
family history	being overweight
age	being inactive
gender	eating a high sodium diet
race or ethnicity	smoking
	alcohol use

Check Often

Because high blood pressure usually doesn't have symptoms, it is important to have it checked regularly to reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke. Some situations can cause your blood pressure to temporarily increase, such as exercise, anxiety and stress. These elevations are normal and typically aren't a concern. However, regular and prolonged elevations in blood pressure can be serious. Readings above 180 over 120 mm Hg are dangerously high and require immediate medical attention. The best way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have it monitored by your doctor. Working with your doctor, checking your blood pressure regularly and maintaining a healthy lifestyle can help keep your blood pressure under control*.

*For benefit coverage, visit TRICARE's Covered Services page at **www.tricare.mil/coveredservices**. Ask your doctor for age recommendations and risk guidelines.*

HEALTH NET FEDERAL SERVICES
A wholly-owned subsidiary of Centene Corporation

TRICARE®