

Patient Information:

Blood Pressure

What does the blood pressure reading mean?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. Arteries are blood vessels (thick, muscular tubes) that carry oxygen-rich blood from the heart to the rest of the body.

Blood pressure (BP) has two measurements:

- ◆ top number=systolic-pressure on arteries when the heart is pumping
- ◆ bottom number=diastolic-pressure on arteries when the heart is resting.

Why worry about high blood pressure (hypertension)?

When blood pressure remains too high, arterial walls become weakened and more prone to atherosclerosis (a build-up of fatty substances on the inner walls). The heart then works harder to pump blood through the clogged arteries. Clogged arteries are more prone to blood clots that can block arteries completely.

Untreated hypertension can lead to heart attacks, strokes, or kidney problems.

RISK FACTORS

- ◆ Family history: parent/grandparent with heart attack < 50 yrs old; one parent with high BP increases the risk; 2 parents, even greater.

- ◆ Cigarette smoking
- ◆ Obesity/sedentary lifestyle
- ◆ High cholesterol
- ◆ Oral contraceptives-especially in women older than 35.
- ◆ Alcohol-more than two drinks/day
- ◆ Race-more common in African-Americans
- ◆ Diabetes and kidney disease

What if my blood pressure is too high?

Make an appointment with a Schiffert Health Center practitioner and/or health educator. To make the diagnosis of high blood pressure, BP has to be taken multiple times. Fever, cold medicines, stress, caffeine, and lack of sleep can all temporarily elevate BP; so it is best to have it taken when these factors are absent.

During the appointment, risk factors will be assessed; and blood cholesterol will be ordered. Lifestyle changes (diet, exercise, smoking) will be addressed, and a referral may be made to the staff dietitian. Medicine is prescribed only if lifestyle changes have not lowered the BP or if certain risk factors are present.

Classifying Blood Pressure

If Your Blood Pressure Values Are:*			Reading Result:
Systolic **		Diastolic **	
Less than 120	And	Less than 80	Normal blood pressure
120—139	or	80-89	Borderline/Prehypertension
140—159	or	90-99	Stage 1 (mild) hypertension
≥ 160	or	≥ 100	Stage 2 hypertension

Source: Report of the Joint National Committee on Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure, Bethesda, MD, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National High Blood Pressure Program, 2003

*If your systolic and diastolic blood pressures are at different levels, the higher level is your blood pressure class.

** Systolic blood pressure is the top, or first, number; diastolic is the bottom, or second, number.