

# Show Me Health

**For Publication Tuesday, February 17, 2009**

**Author Alvina Benskin, LPN**

## **Keeping your blood pressure in check could add years to your life (or High Blood Pressure)**

Getting your blood pressure checked is one of the simplest medical tests you can have done. No needles are needed; no blood is drawn. No fasting is necessary; no x-rays are required. Although the test is simple, it is one of the most important things you can do to protect your health.

High blood pressure is a primary risk factor for heart disease – Missouri’s number one killer. It is also a leading risk factor for stroke – the third most common cause of death and the leading cause of disability in the state. High blood pressure can also damage your kidneys and eyes. Nearly 30 percent of Missouri adults have high blood pressure. That number is even higher for African Americans, whose high blood pressure rate tops 40 percent. High blood pressure is often called the “silent killer” because it usually has no symptoms until serious problems develop. However, the condition is easily detected and can usually be treated successfully.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and is a major cause of disability. Since 1963, Congress has required the president to proclaim February "American Heart Month" to urge Americans to join the battle against these diseases. Missouri has made progress in reducing heart disease and stroke, but these diseases continue to take a toll on our state being the first and third leading causes of death. By wearing red and making a donation, you'll help the American Heart Association support ongoing research and education about women and heart disease.

What is a normal blood pressure? For most people, a blood pressure reading of 120/80 is normal, while a blood pressure greater than 140/90 is high. A person whose blood pressure falls between those levels is considered to have pre-hypertension and is at serious risk for developing high blood pressure.

A number of factors increase your risk for developing high blood pressure, including:

- Being overweight or obese
- Having high cholesterol
- Having diabetes
- Not getting enough physical activity
- Consuming too much salt and not enough potassium
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Smoking

Some risk factors for high blood pressure, such as age, race and a family history of high blood pressure cannot be changed, but there are several things you can do to help keep your blood pressure at a healthy level:

- **Have your blood pressure checked regularly.** If it is high, be sure to follow your doctor's recommendations for treating it. You can have your blood pressure checked at the health center on a walk-in basis. It's a good idea to call ahead and make sure our nurses aren't in a clinic, so your wait time is brief.

- **Take your medications as prescribed.**
- **Monitor cholesterol levels.** You can get a complete cholesterol test for a minimal charge of \$13 by appointment at the health center.
- **Control diabetes.** We have a Diabetes Outreach program which includes the services of a Certified Diabetes Educator, Anita Perry, RN; support group classes every other month and an educational newsletter. Call our office at 646-5506 for more information about these services.
- **Be physically active.**
- **Eat a healthy diet to promote a healthy weight.**
- **Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol use.**

Having your blood pressure checked on a regular basis is important, but it is only the first step. Taking action to protect your body from the dangers of high blood pressure is vital to your good health.

More information about high blood pressure can be found at: [www.dhss.mo.gov/HighBloodPressure/](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/HighBloodPressure/).

Livingston County Health Center is an equal opportunity provider.