

High Blood Pressure Adds to the Heart's Work

Everyone has blood pressure. It's the force of the blood against the walls of the arteries. The heart generates this force as it pumps blood to all the parts of the body.

In some people, blood pressure is nearly always higher than it should be because their arteries clamp down or shut off, making it harder to pass through. This makes their blood pressure rise.

High blood pressure adds to the workload of the heart and arteries. The heart must pump with more force, and the arteries must carry blood that is moving under greater pressure. If high blood pressure continues for a long time, the heart and the arteries may not function as well as they should and other body organs could be affected. Consequently, there is an increased risk of stroke, heart failure, kidney failure and heart attack.

Most people with high blood pressure have no symptoms at all. There are no specific warning signs. Although persistent headaches, dizziness, fatigue, tension and shortness of breath sometimes go with high blood pressure, they are also common as a result from a variety of other causes.

The only way to find out whether or not you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked. You can go to your doctor or to St. Thomas More Emergency Room, where they routinely screen and check blood pressure free of charge to the community. There are also many blood pressure screening machines located at area pharmacies/grocery stores.

If a person has high blood pressure, he/she can be helped if their blood pressure is checked periodically and they stay under medical treatment. There are many medications that can be used to reduce and control blood pressure, and a medical program can be found that is suited to individual needs.

The treatment plan is easier to follow than most people think. By following instructions the patient has hope. He/she knows they are doing something to prolong their life and to reduce the risk of stroke, heart attack, kidney failure and/or heart failure.

A few simple steps to follow are:

- Have your blood pressure checked to find out if it is high (especially if you have family history)
- Keep a record. Even if your blood pressure is normal, keeping a record will assist your doctor in your treatment if you develop high blood pressure.
- If you do have high blood pressure, follow your doctor's advice about taking medications, and changing your diet and health habits.
- Keep taking your medications as long as your doctor says, even if you feel well.
- Cooperate. You and your doctor must work together to formulate a plan that works best for you and the control of your blood pressure.

It all depends on you.