

## Checking Blood Pressure

Getting your blood pressure checked regularly is important. It could well save your life! High blood pressure can be a silent killer in that it can cause other problems such as kidney failure, heart attacks and strokes - sometimes without warning and often with fatal results.

It is precisely because high blood pressure has no symptoms in its early stages that you should get yours checked often. If your readings are normal you can go as long as three years between routine checks. If it is raised, however, your blood pressure should be monitored on a much more frequent basis.

When having a blood pressure reading taken, the patient should sit comfortably in a chair, with his or her sleeve rolled up. It is possible to have a blood pressure monitor used while lying down, although it is not ideal # the best position for having a blood pressure measurement done is sitting. A health care professional usually performs the blood pressure check, though it can be done by any competent person.

Your health care provider begins by wrapping a rubber-lined cuff around your upper arm. This cuff is part of the pressure measuring device known as a sphygmomanometer. These cuffs used to be filled with mercury, and the pressure would be taken by pumping up the cuff physically.

Nowadays, the sphygmomanometer is electronic, and the blood pressure is read by a small computer within the sphygmomanometer. A stethoscope can be used with some models, but nowadays they are rarely used.

Once the cuff has been wrapped around the upper arm, it is inflated and temporarily stops the blood flow to the arm. The sounds of the person's blood rushing through their artery can be heard through the stethoscope (if one is being used.) Two readings are given: systolic, when your heart contracts, and diastolic, when it is at rest.

It is important that you be totally relaxed when your blood pressure reading is taken, otherwise a false reading can be obtained.

Obtaining a regular blood pressure reading can be a simple but effective way to save your own life.