

## **Know Your Numbers for Heart Health**

February is American Heart Month. There are steps that you can take to take care of your heart.

Today, there are so many different numbers that we have to remember. These include passwords, bank account numbers and even passwords to get into our own homes.

Forgetting numbers can be stressful. However there are some numbers that it is important for you to know for your heart.

Do you know your blood pressure? About one in three people have high blood pressure, and some do not know that they have it. That is 75 million American adults. Only half of those with high blood pressure have it under control according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Blood pressure, the force of our blood pushing against the walls of the arteries, is composed of two numbers. The upper number, or “systolic” reading, refers to the actual beating and contracting of the heart. The lower number, or “diastolic” reading, refers to the heart at rest.

According to the CDC, a normal blood pressure for people 18 and older is one where the systolic reading is less than 120 and the diastolic reading is less than 80. High blood pressure, or “hypertension,” is defined as having a blood pressure reading greater than or equal to 140 over 90. Hypertension is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

High blood pressure makes your heart work harder and increases your risk of heart attack, stroke or kidney damage. A few of the risk factors, we have no control over, this includes our age, genetic makeup and race. There are things we can change and this includes stress, being overweight, smoking, eating a high-sodium diet, drinking alcohol in excess and living a sedentary lifestyle. We can modify all of these risk factors.

A study published by the New England Journal of Medicine, reported that the fruit, vegetable and low-fat dairy rich diet lowered blood pressure in individuals whether they had normal or high blood pressure.

In January 2018, the DASH diet tied with the Mediterranean Diet as the “best diet, healthiest diet” by U.S. News and World Reports.

The DASH diet promotes a daily eating plan that includes at least four or five servings of fruits, four to five servings of vegetables and seven to eight servings of grain foods daily, with at least three of those daily grain servings being whole grain. The diet also includes two to three servings of low-fat dairy daily, two servings of lean meat daily and four servings of nuts and seeds per week.

High blood pressure usually can be managed with medication, diet changes and physical activity. See your health provider to learn your numbers. It only takes a minute. If you are on blood pressure medications, don't stop taking them without the advice of a physician. You may want to discuss the DASH diet with your health-care provider.

