

### **National Heart Health Month:**

Blood pressure screening is empowering

Knowing you're on the path to developing a life-threatening disease can be scary, but if it allows you to take positive action to avoid or better manage that illness, it can also be empowering.

Take for example, high blood pressure. Left untreated, hypertension damages blood vessels, causing them to clog or weaken and making them more prone to the blockage that leads to cardiovascular disease or stroke.

Damage to the arteries can also create weak places that rupture easily or thin spots that balloon out the artery wall called aneurysms. If an aneurysm bursts, it results in dangerous internal bleeding.

Yet as risky as high blood pressure is, it often produces no symptoms, so it can't be detected without being measured.

That's why it's important to include blood pressure among health assessments: to detect abnormally high readings as early as possible. Blood pressure readings provide an "early-warning system" that gives a person with hypertension a chance to make lifestyle changes that can literally save his or her life. Those changes can include:

- Losing weight
- Exercising regularly
- Eating a healthy diet
- Reducing the amount sodium consumed
- Limiting the amount of alcohol consumed
- Quitting smoking
- Cutting down on caffeine
- Reducing stress



Colleen Sideck, Registered Dietitian and Public Health masters' student states that it is important for all of us to get our blood pressure checked regularly at the doctors, a supermarket or gym with a blood pressure cuff, or even at home by purchasing a cuff at your local drug store. Having high blood pressure makes our heart work harder, taxing it. She also recommends watching our salt intake, a major dietary factor to increased blood pressure. One thing Colleen does to limit her salt intake is to add an array of herbs to her foods.

Colleen also educates her patients to emphasize vegetables and fruits- foods that have fiber and therefore prevent plaque buildup. Vegetables and fruits are great sources of antioxidants which help to decrease oxidative stress, thereby preventing arterial and blood vessel damage. Colleen also loves vegetables and fruit because they are low calories, provide bulk, and are a great snack at work!

What could be more empowering than having a say in your future quality of life? And it all starts with a simple, 5-minute screening and a dietary change or two.