



HEART HEALTH

Common Misconceptions About Heart Disease

(NAPSA)—Nearly one in three Americans has high blood pressure—and 30 percent of those affected, don't know it. High blood pressure is defined as 140/90mm Hg, but optimal blood pressure is lower than 120/80mm Hg. If left uncontrolled, high blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure.

A common misconception is high blood pressure has symptoms such as nervousness, heavy sweating or difficulty sleeping. The reality is high blood pressure has no signs or symptoms. As a result many people may suffer from high blood pressure for years without knowing it. This is why it is often called a “silent killer.”

This is one of many misconceptions that can result in people not seeking out or receiving the medical attention they need to control their high blood pressure. Here are some other common excuses:

- **I don't need to have my high blood pressure checked until I reach middle age.** It's a good idea to start having your blood pressure checked at an early age—even children as young as 6 can have high blood pressure. When kids reach the teen years, they should certainly have their pressure checked.

- **I took my high blood pressure medication for a while, but I'm feeling much better now.** High blood pressure is a lifelong disease. It can be controlled but not cured. If your doctor has prescribed medication for you, take it exactly as prescribed for as long as the doctor tells you to take it. Decreasing dosage or not taking the medication is dangerous.

- **My blood pressure is high at the doctor's office, but that's just because I'm nervous.** Some people may experi-



ence what's called “white-coat hypertension” when they're at the doctor's office. This means their blood pressure is elevated temporarily due to nervousness. Even though there are factors that can affect your blood pressure, you should never ignore several readings that indicate you may have high blood pressure.

- **These days everyone has high blood pressure.** High blood pressure is a medical condition, not just another term for “stress.” That's why it's so important to have your blood pressure checked. People with uncontrolled high blood pressure are three times more likely to develop coronary heart disease and six times more likely to develop congestive heart failure. Also, high blood pressure is the number one modifiable risk factor for stroke.

Find out about these and other common misconceptions, and get answers to your high blood pressure questions, at the American Heart Association High Blood Pressure information center. It offers Web tools people can use to help reduce their risk of heart attack and stroke. Visit americanheart.org/hbp.