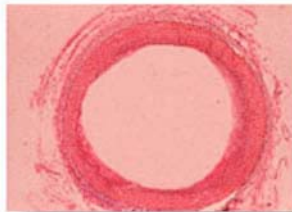


High Blood Pressure

Everyone's heart is a pump pushing the blood around the body. That's why when we cut our skin, blood keeps coming out, because the heart is pushing it. Blood moves through veins and arteries, like water moving through a pipe.

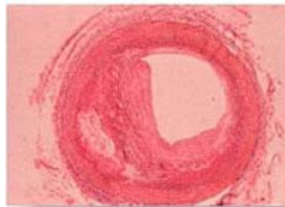


If the artery is clean and smooth then the heart can push the blood quickly and easily.



Normal Artery

If the artery gets dirty and the opening inside gets smaller, the blood moves slower. Then the heart has to work harder to keep the blood moving.



Blocked Artery

When the heart works harder the blood pressure goes up. The heart can wear out early from working this hard, or one of the veins or arteries can break and bleed inside the body. If this break happens in the brain, it's called a stroke. When people have a stroke they are suddenly unable to walk or talk. They often have a permanent problem using one side of their body.



Sometimes an artery becomes completely blocked and the blood stops going to that part of the body. If this happens around the heart it's called a heart attack and the heart can just stop pumping. If this happens a person can die very quickly.



Heart disease is called the “silent killer” because many people have no symptoms until the day they have a stroke or a heart attack and then it's too late. To prevent early death from heart disease doctors always check blood pressure. They also ask patients about parents and other family members, because heart disease and high blood pressure can be family traits, just like brown eyes or small feet.



As people get older high blood pressure becomes more common. For some people getting fat can cause high blood pressure. Diseases like diabetes, or kidney disease can also cause high blood pressure. Some women get high blood pressure when they get pregnant.



Blood pressure is always measured twice, when the heart is pumping and when it's resting. So every blood pressure report has a high and low number. 120 over 80 is the highest blood pressure that is healthy. When blood pressure is over 120 for the high number or over 80 for the low number then it is too high.



If blood pressure is consistently high, a doctor will recommend taking medicine to keep it low.



Losing weight and getting more exercise can also help to lower blood pressure, and for some people eating less salt helps too.



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