

## May is National Blood Pressure Awareness Month

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Since 1984, May has been proclaimed as National Blood Pressure Awareness Month in the United States. The official motto of the blood pressure awareness initiative is “know your numbers.”

More than one out of every 10 Americans has high blood pressure. Many of those who have high blood pressure are unaware that they have it. It is known as a “silent disease.” Often there are no symptoms until it is too late. A catastrophic event such as a heart attack or stroke is all too often the first indication of a problem.

Early detection of high blood pressure is vital so that effective treatment may be instituted. Home monitoring is effective in screening. However, do not panic by one elevated reading. Because your blood pressure varies up and down, you will need to have several elevated readings to base treatment on. At least one-third of the people whose first reading is high will be found to have normal readings on subsequent checks.

In general, everyone’s blood pressure varies in the same way throughout a given day. It is usually highest at work and then drops slightly at home.

Blood pressure falls to its lowest level during sleep but suddenly increases at waking.

This period represents the highest risk for heart attack and stroke in those with severe high blood pressure.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that hypertension may be managed. While medication may be indicated, weight control, regular exercise, reducing salt intake, and stress relief may help to control elevated blood pressure.

It is important to talk with your health care provider about your hypertension to devise a plan for a healthy lifestyle to reduce your blood pressure.