



## High Blood Pressure - The Silent Killer

By Dr. Craig Burrows, Chief Medical Officer, Mammoth Hospital

**H**igh blood pressure (or hypertension) is a very common medical condition. The long-term effects of untreated high blood pressure can result in serious health problems such as heart disease, kidney failure, or stroke. High blood pressure results when the pressure of circulating blood is high enough that it causes changes within the walls of the arteries, or tubes that make up your circulation system.

High blood pressure generally develops over many years as part of our normal aging process. But many younger people can have high blood pressure as well. High blood pressure can go on for years without any symptoms at all. But all the while, damage to blood vessels and your heart can continue unchecked, which is why it is very important to have regular blood pressure check-ups.

Fortunately, high blood pressure is easily detected, and once you know you have high blood pressure, you can work with your doctor to control it. Often times, high blood pressure can be reduced through regular exercise, altering your diet, improving stress management, reducing alcohol consumption, and other lifestyle changes. There are also many blood pressure medications that are highly effective in reducing high blood pressure. It is important to know that certain medications, such as cold remedies, decongestants, and other over-the-counter items may also elevate blood pressure. Your doctor can guide and assist you in finding the right medicines to take, and also the ones to avoid. In addition, your doctor can recommend activities and lifestyle changes to help get your blood pressure back down to healthy levels.



Remember, most people with high blood pressure have no signs or symptoms, even when blood pressure readings reach dangerously high levels. When symptoms do occur, it is most often when blood pressures have reached severe or life-threatening levels. Common symptoms include headache, shortness of breath, or nosebleeds. If you are experiencing any of these kinds of symptoms regularly, you should see your doctor right away.

Public blood pressure machines, such as those found in pharmacies, may provide helpful information about your blood pressure, but they may have some limitations. The accuracy of these machines depends on several factors, such as a correct cuff size, regular machine maintenance, and proper use. And while these machines can be useful to help monitor blood pressure, they should not be used for diagnostic purposes. Good health is our most precious possession. So take the time to establish a trusting relationship with a knowledgeable physician and get your blood pressure checked regularly. Good blood pressure control can add years to your life and life to your years.