Expert advice on controlling your blood pressure: a NetWellness column

By Plain Dealer guest columnist
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Question: I am 42 years old, 6 feet tall and weight 203 lbs. I work out regularly -- usually four days a week for 30 minutes each time. My blood pressure is 136 over 73. I've read that a normal blood pressure is 120 over 80. Is my blood pressure too high? Should I be concerned? What can I do to lower my blood pressure, if that is what needs to happen?

Answer: Blood pressure typically is high and low. When the blood pressure is found to be high over a period of time, it is called high blood pressure. Anyone can develop high blood pressure.

Blood pressure has two measurements. One is the force of blood flowing through your arteries or blood vessels when the heart contracts to pump blood. The other is when the heart rests between beats. In people with high blood pressure, the tension within the blood vessels is greater, which makes the heart work harder.

Unless you have diabetes or kidney disease, you do not require medications to lower your blood pressure below its current level. However, you would be classified as "pre-hypertensive" meaning that you have an increased risk (about 90 percent over 20 years) to have your blood pressure rise to the hypertensive range (greater than 140/90) where drug therapy would be recommended.
Why Blood Pressure Control Matters

Having high blood pressure over a long period of time can cause the muscle of the heart to thicken. When the muscle of the heart is too big, it can't pump as much blood, leading to a lot of health problems. High blood pressure puts you at a higher risk for the following conditions:

- Stroke
- Congestive heart failure
- Kidney failure
- Heart attack
- Heart rhythm problems
- Aneurysm

What you can do

Recommendations for someone with your blood pressure is aggressive life style changes including:

- Calorie reduction
- Elimination of salt in your diet
- Increase in fruits, vegetables, and low fat dairy products
- Moderation of alcohol intake
- Elimination of cigarettes if you smoke
- Regular aerobic exercise, which you appear to be doing
- Reduction in stress

Your height and weight place your body mass index in the overweight category. Thus, you certainly have room to reduce calories further. To test your BMI as you lose weight, you can refer to the BMI Calculator available from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Good luck.

Research Unit at Case Western Reserve University’s School of Medicine.
- For more information, visit the High Blood Pressure health topic.
- Sign up for the NetWellness Monthly Newsletter.
- Read previous NetWellness columns.