

Heart News

This new Heart Insight department reports on recent science from the AHA/ASA newsroom as well as stories on public policy and programs that may be helpful for heart patients and their families.

Don't Be a Stranger

SEEING YOUR DOCTOR TWICE A YEARS HELPS KEEP BLOOD PRESSURE UNDER CONTROL



People who visited their doctor at least twice a year were 3.2 times more likely to keep their blood pressure under control than those who saw their doctor once a year or less, according to new research published in the American Heart Association's

journal *Circulation*. Having healthcare insurance and getting treated for high cholesterol also increased the likelihood of keeping under control.

Ideal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mmHg. Blood pressure of 140 mmHg or greater (systolic, the top number) or 90 mmHg or greater (diastolic, the bottom number) is considered high.

Obese people in the study were also more likely to keep their blood pressure under control. "Probably because doctors recognize the need to control risk factors and may be quicker to give them blood pressure medications," said Brent M. Egan, M.D., study author and professor of medicine at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine in Greenville and senior medical director of the Care Coordination Institute.

Egan's data included reports on 37,000 adults in

the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey who had their blood pressure checked in 1999-2012.

After controlling for diabetes, health insurance, body mass index, smoking and other factors, Egan found that doctor visits were the strongest predictor of blood pressure control.

Hypertension is a major risk factor for heart attack and stroke. High blood pressure (BP 140/90 mmHg) is present in about:

- 69 percent of people who have a first heart attack
- 77 percent who have a first stroke
- 74 percent who have congestive heart failure

As many as 83 percent of the 80 million adults with high blood pressure know they have it. But only 77 percent are treated and only about 54 percent have it controlled below 140/90 mmHg.

The American Heart Association recommends that people with blood pressure readings of 140/90 mmHg or higher make lifestyle changes such as losing weight, eating healthy, engaging in physical activity and if necessary, taking medicine. **HI**