

HEALTH ALERT!

Inaccurate Blood Pressure Readings Can Pose Health Risk

(NAPS)—You look good, even feel good—but not so fast. The best measure of true health may be the numbers inside your body—and of those numbers, doctors say blood pressure ranks among the top.

According to the American Heart Association, 50 million Americans over age 6 (one out of five) suffer from high blood pressure. Almost a third of them don't know it. High blood pressure, or hypertension, can cause heart and kidney disease, stroke, even death. Within the past ten years, deaths from high blood pressure have risen almost 50 percent.

Doctors agree that getting an accurate reading of your blood pressure is very important for managing your health.

There are three different types of instruments used to measure blood pressure: aneroid (circular), digital (electronic) and mercury-gravity (column) manometers. Recently, doctors have questioned the accuracy of some of these devices.

"The gold standard for accurate blood pressure measurement is mercury," says Dr. Paul Thompson, director of preventive cardiology and cardiovascular research at Hartford Hospital and professor of medicine at the University of Connecticut.

"Over time," he continues, "digital and aneroid devices can become decalibrated or fall out of balance due to metal fatigue and other sources of variability.



Heart Smart—Having an accurate blood pressure reading can help you take control of your health.

Because the weight of mercury and the effect of gravity never change, we know a mercury-gravity reading is always accurate."

Doctors rely on mercury-gravity manometers for scientifically accurate readings.

"When you go to your doctor's office, the first thing you should do is look to see how your blood pressure is being measured," advises Dr. Thompson. "If it's with a mercury-gravity manometer, you can relax. If it's being measured with an aneroid or digital instrument, simply ask: 'When was the last time this machine was calibrated for accuracy?' A lot of doctors' offices never calibrate their devices."

Doctors recommend the next time you have your blood pressure taken, ask when the device was last calibrated. High blood pressure can't be cured, but in most cases it can be controlled. Having your pressure accurately measured is one way to keep on track to good health.