

HYPERTENSION (High Blood Pressure)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

DESCRIPTION

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the artery walls. It is often written or stated as two numbers. The first or top number represents the pressure when the heart contracts. This is called systolic pressure. The second or bottom number represents the pressure when the heart rests between beats. This is called the diastolic pressure. High blood pressure is a systolic of 140 or higher and a diastolic of 90 or higher.

Blood pressure normally rises and falls throughout the day. When it consistently stays too high for too long, it is called hypertension.

It is estimated that 1 of 3 American adults has high blood pressure or hypertension. Having high blood pressure increases one's chance for developing heart disease, a stroke, and other serious conditions.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Usually no symptoms occur. It is often discovered when blood pressure is measured.
- Vague, mild symptoms such as headache, dizziness, blurred vision, or nausea may occur.

CAUSES

Mostly unknown (called primary hypertension). In some cases, it results from certain medical problems (called secondary hypertension).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Aging and hardening of the arteries
- Obesity; smoking; stress
- Alcoholism
- Sensitivity to sodium
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Genetic factors. Hypertension is more common among African-Americans
- Family history of hypertension, stroke, heart attack or kidney failure.
- Use of contraceptive pills, steroids and some appetite suppressants or decongestants
- Adrenal gland disorders
- Chronic kidney disease

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Maintain a healthy lifestyle and have your blood pressure checked regularly.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

With treatment, complications can be preventable. Life expectancy is near normal. Without treatment, life expectancy is reduced because of the likelihood of heart attack, stroke, or kidney failure. High blood pressure is called the "silent killer."

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Stroke
- Heart disease
- Kidney failure

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam, measure your blood pressure, and ask questions about your lifestyle and family medical history. Medical tests may include blood and urine studies. Other tests may be done to find a cause for the high blood pressure or to determine if there are any complications.
- Treatment steps will depend on each individual. You and your health care provider will decide on a treatment plan. Steps may involve diet changes, weight loss, stopping smoking, increasing exercise, limiting alcohol use, reducing stress, and taking drugs.
- Take your blood pressure at home each day. Write down the results. Have your blood pressure checked regularly by a health professional.
- Counseling, meditation, biofeedback, relaxation techniques, or other therapies can help you reduce stress.
- Talk to your health care provider before trying alternate forms of treatment such as acupuncture, diet supplements, and others.

MEDICATION

High blood pressure can be treated with both lifestyle modifications, usually as the first step, and, if needed, anti-hypertensive medications. Lifestyle factors to treat high blood pressure include weight control, exercise, healthy diet, limiting alcohol use, and other lifestyle modifications. Do not take non-prescription cold and sinus remedies unless recommended by your medical provider. Do not stop or change your medication unless advised by your medical provider.

ACTIVITY & DIET

If you are over weight, losing weight can help lower your blood pressure. Engage in physical activities for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. An overall healthy diet that includes eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables and lowering or cutting out salt or sodium and increasing potassium also help to maintain a healthy blood pressure. If you drink, do so in moderation. Don't smoke.

Student Health Center

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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.



618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.