

Prevention Newsletter

...for the health and well-being of you and your family.



Approximately 1 in 3 American adults has high blood pressure, according to the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute. This equates to about 73 million people! Even more troubling, many people live with high blood pressure for years without even knowing it. Often, those with untreated high blood pressure get very sick and some even die. Bring this issue of Prevention Newsletter to your next doctor's visit and discuss what you can do to ensure you live a long, healthy life.

IN THIS EDITION:

The Numbers..... pg 1
 What Causes High Blood Pressure?. pg 1
 Controlling High Blood Pressure pg 2
 A Word to the Wise..... pg 2

Control Your Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (HBP), also known as hypertension, is a serious condition which can lead to coronary heart disease, heart failure, stroke, kidney failure and other health problems. HBP is often referred to as the “silent killer,” as it has no symptoms. This is why it is so crucial to get your blood pressure checked at a *minimum* of every 2 years, and keep it under control.

The Numbers

Blood pressure numbers refer to the systolic (pressure when the heart beats while pumping blood) and diastolic (pressure when the heart is at rest) pressures. Normal blood pressure is usually 120/80 mmHg (millimeters of mercury). The table below illustrates normal numbers for adults and shows which numbers put you at a greater risk for health problems.

| CATEGORY | Systolic (top number) | | Diastolic (bottom number) |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| Normal | Less than 120 | And | Less than 80 |
| Prehypertension | 120-139 | Or | 80-89 |
| High Blood Pressure Stage 1 | 140-159 | Or | 90-99 |
| HBP Stage 2 | 160 or higher | Or | 100 or higher |

The ranges in the table apply to most adults who do not have short-term serious illnesses.

What Causes High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure tends to rise with age, unless you take steps to prevent it. Certain medical problems, medications, and pregnancy can also raise blood pressure. There are also specific factors that may put one more at risk, including older age (over half of Americans ages 60 and older have HBP); being African-American; those who are overweight; being male; having long-lasting stress; and engaging in

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unhealthy lifestyle habits such as eating too much salt, excessive alcohol consumption, not getting enough potassium, not exercising, and smoking.

Controlling High Blood Pressure

Unfortunately, most people with HBP will need lifelong treatment. Your doctor will outline the best plan for you, but it may include:

■ Lifestyle Changes

Healthy habits will help you control your HBP. You should follow a healthy eating plan, get lots of physical activity, maintain a healthy weight, choose foods low in sodium, quit smoking, lessen or cease your alcohol consumption, and learn effective ways to manage stress.

■ The DASH Diet

DASH, or Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, is an eating plan that focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other heart-healthy foods which are lower in sodium. The diet is low in fat and cholesterol and features fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry and nuts. The DASH plan suggests limiting your intake of red meat (even if lean), sweets, added sugar, and sugar-laden beverages. Many physicians have recommended this plan for patients that have high blood pressure because it requires no special foods or recipes and is relatively easy to follow.

■ Medicines

Today's blood pressure medicines can safely help most people control their HBP. The side effects typically tend to be minor. These medications work in different ways; some remove extra fluid and salt from the body, while others slow down the heartbeat or relax and widen blood vessels. Sometimes, two or more medicines together work better than just one. The different kinds of medications include:

- *Diuretics* – Also called water pills, they help your kidneys flush excess water and salt from your body.
- *Beta Blockers* – These help your heart beat slower and with less force.
- *ACE Inhibitors* – Your body is prevented from making a hormone called angiotensin II, which narrows blood vessels, with this medication.
- *Angiotensin II Receptor Blockers (ARBs)* – These medications protect your body from angiotensin II and as a result, blood vessels relax and widen.
- *Calcium Channel Blockers (CCBs)* – They keep calcium from entering the muscle cells of your heart and blood vessels, which allows them to relax.
- *Alpha Blockers* – These reduce nerve impulses that tighten blood vessels.
- *Alpha-Beta Blockers* – Much like alpha blockers, these medications reduce nerve impulses, but they also slow the heartbeat.
- *Nervous System Inhibitors* – With these medications, nerve impulses from the brain are relaxed and blood vessels are widened.
- *Vasodilators* – These relax the muscles in blood vessel walls.

A Word to the Wise

If you currently do not suffer from high blood pressure, keep it that way! Follow a healthy eating plan – perhaps the DASH plan – which incorporates plenty of fruits, veggies and low-fat dairy products. Maintain a healthy weight by being active for at least 1 to 2 hours a day; this can include doing housework or taking the dog for a walk. Finally, put those cigarettes down for good! By changing your lifestyle now, you can be confident you will have a healthy future.

Source: The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute.

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