

Dealing With Hypertension

Hypertension, the medical term for high blood pressure, is a major public health problem affecting nearly 50 million Americans.

What is Hypertension?

Blood pressure is a measurement of the force against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps blood through your body. A high level of blood pressure causes the heart to work harder than normal to circulate blood throughout the body, leading to numerous other health problems.

Consequences of Hypertension

High blood pressure is a significant contributor to heart disease and stroke, the first and third leading causes of death in America. It's also a factor in congestive heart failure and kidney disease. As of 2007, hypertension was a contributing cause of death for 336,353 Americans, and was responsible for over 46 million visits to the doctor. About half of all people with hypertension do not manage to control their blood pressure, leading to chronic long-term health problems.

Signs and Symptoms

Generally, there are no symptoms for hypertension, and most people only find out when they visit their health care provider or have it checked elsewhere. A regular check-up with a healthcare professional is vital to determining if you have hypertension.

Causes and Risk Factors

Many things can determine your



hypertension, namely your age, body weight, and stress level. Other considerations include how much water and salt you have in your body; the condition of your kidneys, nervous system, or blood vessels; and the levels of different body hormones

High-risk factors include: being African American, being overweight and obese, having frequent stress and anxiety, drinking too much alcohol (more than one drink per day for women and more than two drinks per day for men), consuming too much salt, having a family history of high blood pressure, and smoking. Many times, there is no clear cause, leading to what is called essential hypertension. This may be the result of other health conditions (such as kidney diseases) or certain medications or substances, such as birth control or some cold medicines.

Treatment and Prevention

Have your blood pressure checked regularly, and set up a goal and plan to reduce high blood pressure with your doctor. Most causes of hyperten-

sion can be addressed by lifestyle changes. Quit smoking, reduce your alcohol intake, maintain a healthy weight, and eat a healthier diet, with higher fiber, more fruits and vegetables, and less salt. Regular exercise of at least 30 minutes a day can reduce blood pressure sig-

nificantly. Talk to your doctor about taking medications to help with your blood pressure.

Learn more at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001502/> Sources: NIH, CDC-

HIGHLIGHTS

Blood pressure readings are usually given as two numbers, for example 120/80 mmHg. One or both of these numbers can be too high.

Normal blood pressure is when your blood pressure is lower than 120/80 mmHg most of the time.

High blood pressure (hypertension) is when your blood pressure is 140/90 mmHg or above most of the time.

If your blood pressure numbers are 120/80 or higher, but below 140/90, it is called pre-hypertension. In this range, you are more likely to develop high blood pressure in the future.

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