

High Blood Pressure

Written by Dr. Fitt

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High blood pressure is one of the most common medical conditions faced by Americans. Hypertension is the medical term that describes the condition of elevated pressure in the walls of arteries. When the cause is unknown, the condition is referred to as "essential hypertension". In medical school we were taught that there was no known cause and no cure. A diagnosis sentenced a patient to medication for the rest of their lives. Hypertension has been labeled "the silent killer" because of the havoc that can be wreaked without the patient feeling any symptoms. High blood pressure is related to a higher incidence of "heart attacks"(hearts don't really attack, but that's another column), strokes, diabetes, Alzheimer's and kidney failure. There are some people who are alerted to rises in vessel pressure by nose bleeds, blurry vision, or headaches. Most people walking around with high blood pressure, however, have no idea they have a ticking time bomb that could leave them paralyzed by a stroke or committed to relying on a kidney dialysis machine to replace failed kidneys. The insidiousness of the progression of the underlying disease requires that you be vigilant, monitoring your blood pressure on a regular basis. This can easily and best be done by purchasing a home blood pressure monitor. You don't want to depend on the blood pressure reading you get while you're at your stressed filled annual doctor visit. Get a unit with a cuff that wraps around your upper arm and automatically takes your pressure with the touch of a button. Units that keep a log of your pressures allow you to monitor the effectiveness of interventions. Alternatively, you can keep a written log. Readings should be taken after you are in a relaxed state for ten minutes. The monitored arm should be elevated to the level of the heart. Caffeinated products such as coffee and cold medications should be avoided to get an accurate reading. Pain will increase blood pressure. If you take medicine for high blood pressure, readings should be taken in the morning prior to taking your medication. The top number, systolic, should not exceed 120. The bottom number, diastolic, should not exceed 80. Normal blood pressures are not age dependent any more than normal vision standards. Think of 120/80 blood pressure as the equivalent of 20/20 vision. Your eye doctor would never tell you your vision is "normal for your age". High blood is a symptom, an indication of an underlying imbalance. It is not a disease to be singularly focused on while ignoring its cause. Think of high blood pressure as you would the warning light on your dashboard indicating low oil. The light is not your problem, the low oil and its consequences are. You can easily obscure the red light by taping over it, but that does not solve your problem. Similarly, blood pressure medications can lower your numbers, but they don't correct the underlying problem. Successfully reversing high blood pressure requires understanding its cause. 26 years ago when I was told the cause was unknown, that may have been true. Today, however, enough research has been done for us to have a good idea about the causes and cures for high blood pressure. Our first important indication about the cause is reflected by who gets high blood pressure. Age is the most reliable predictor. Something happens as the body ages to cause blood pressure to elevate. Another population at high risk is those who are overweight. Obesity does not cause high blood pressure, as most

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overweight people have normal blood pressure. But there is something that causes a person to be overweight and have high blood pressure. Women are more likely to have high blood pressure than men (Women marry men. Co-incidence?). This suggests a hormonal influence. Non Caucasians are more likely to have high blood pressure than Caucasians. Non Caucasians are also more prone to have the consequence of kidney failure. High blood pressure is more prevalent, regardless of race, here in the U.S. People who move to the U.S. from other countries and adopt U.S. eating habits are more likely to develop high blood pressure. Native Americans who abandon their ancestral diets for the modern American diet (MAD) also develop high blood pressure. High blood pressure does not occur with aging in cultures that have a particular way of eating. All this evidence tells us that high blood pressure is not caused by getting old, being overweight, or being of a certain ethnicity. Further evidence that high blood pressure is a reversible symptom rather than a disease is the recent success of bariatric (stomach stapling) surgery. When people lose weight with this surgery their blood pressure, along with other symptoms, such as high blood sugar, reverses. Since we know that obesity by itself does not cause high blood pressure, this indicates the reversal of some other condition. We also have very solid scientific evidence that particular eating patterns reverse high blood pressure. The "DASH" and "Mediterranean" diets, specifically, have been put under the microscope for their ability to reverse high blood pressure. The DASH diet focuses on reductions in salt, and an increase in fruits and vegetables. The Mediterranean diet focuses on the intake of foods high in phytochemicals (chemicals made by plants) called polyphenols. The job of the doctor is to look at all this information and put together a logical explanation for why blood pressure rises and why it goes down with certain interventions. Medications are appropriate to control blood pressure in the short term, but they are not a long-term solution. My personal and clinical success with treating high blood pressure has led me to a comprehensive treatment plan that predictably reverses high blood pressure. The association of hypertension with obesity, salt intake, ethnicity, age and sex implicates a thyroid hormone imbalance. Elevated blood pressure is a known symptom of hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism increases with age. Women have a higher incidence of hypothyroidism than men. Dark skinned people are more likely to be hypothyroid than Caucasians. Hypothyroidism is associated with obesity. Thyroid hormone lowers blood pressure. Unfortunately, we have no conventional test that accurately diagnoses hypothyroidism. The blood tests are notoriously inaccurate. Diagnosing hypothyroidism requires your doctor understanding what thyroid hormone does and looking at you physically, head to toe, for evidence of compromised thyroid function. Most doctors never thoroughly examine their patients, instead relying on inadequate blood tests. For more information on this topic, get the book "Hypothyroidism Type 2" by Mark Starr M.D. If there is any history of psychiatric illness, such as depression or anxiety, in conjunction with high blood pressure, also get "The Thyroid Solution" by endocrinologist Ridha Arem M.D. Combined with thyroid hormone balancing, diet is extremely important in resolving the underlying cause of hypertension. The MAD diet causes a toxic condition called "inflammation" in the body. Inflammation is a condition where the immune system is highly activated and producing chemicals that can damage organs such as the brain, kidneys, eyes, and blood vessels. Your immune system is the body's military focused on destroying enemy germs. As in any conflict, sometimes the good guys get harmed. The fact that the immune system is activated with high blood pressure suggests that a germ infection is related to high blood pressure. This germ seems to thrive better with the high sugar, high grain MAD diet. Apparently, fruits and vegetables make some chemicals that have a positive effect on killing

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this germ. In particular, very dark fruit and vegetable pigments, like the polyphenols, seem to kill this germ. This accounts for the popularity of dark red and purple juices that are so popular now. You may have friends who swear by juices such as Mona Vie, Mangosteen, pomegranate, black cherry, or Noni. We've known for some time that the French, who drink wine made from purple grapes, have less blood pressure and heart disease problems despite their high fat diet. The Dash diet reminds us that lowering the amount of sodium intake is also important in controlling blood pressure. The DASH diet alone is as effective in lowering blood pressure as prescription medications. Go to, www.dashdiet.org for more info. The efficacy of weight loss in lowering blood pressure cannot be understated. The success of bariatric surgery punctuates the fact that inflammation associated with abdominal obesity plays a role in hypertension. This inflammation likely spills over into the kidney. Under the influence of inflammation, the kidney can over-produce a hormone, renin that will raise blood pressure. Many blood pressure medications (ACE inhibitors) are aimed at reducing renin levels. Incorporating weight-loss strategies is particularly important for men with a waist line over 35 inches or a woman with a waist line over 30 inches. In summary: High blood pressure is a silent symptom that indicates that your body is on fire (inflammation means "on fire") Detection and monitoring is best done using a home unit in a relaxed environment. These can be purchased at your pharmacy. As thyroid levels go down, blood pressure goes up. Diagnosis of hypothyroidism must be done by evaluating the overall health of your body. If you have a low body temperature (less than 98.6 oral), hair loss, dry/lusterless hair and skin, hand/leg swelling, unexplained weight gain not responsive to diet and exercise, unexplained fatigue, depression/anxiety, menstrual irregularities, or problems with memory/concentration, consider hypothyroidism. If you are over 27, female, of ethnic ancestry, overweight, have had multiple pregnancies, had diabetes or hypertension with pregnancy or redheaded, consider hypothyroidism. Change your diet! Don't create a germ promoting environment in your body with the MAD diet. Get information of the DASH and Mediterranean diets and start with those. Go to www.myfoodmyhealth.com to get menu planning ideas from a team of professionals. Combining a regimen of increased activity (call it exercise if you wish) with diet changes gives the best results at weight loss. Work with your physician to gradually reduce the amount of medication you are taking as your blood pressure comes down. Remember, high blood pressure is a choice, not a disease.