

NEW-LIFESTYLES STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOUSM BLOOD PRESSURE FACTS

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High blood pressure is a pervasive problem among Americans, with approximately 65 million persons diagnosed with the condition. That's one out of every three adults! Once high blood pressure develops, it tends to stay with a person for the rest of their lifetime. Fortunately, high blood pressure can be treated and controlled. It's a condition with a learning process like any other.

What is blood pressure?

A vital part of the body's circulatory system, the heart pumps blood to all parts of the body in vessels called arteries. Each time the heart beats, blood pumps through the arteries exerting force against the wall of the arteries measured as blood pressure. Blood pressure is highest when the heart beats, creating a surge of blood through the arteries. This is called systolic pressure. When the heart rests between beats, the blood pressure in the arteries falls. This is called diastolic pressure.

Blood pressure is always measured taking into account both pressure conditions in the arteries - when the heart beats and relaxes. This is why blood pressure is given in two equally important numbers - the systolic pressure over the diastolic pressure. For example, if the systolic pressure measurement is 120 and the diastolic pressure is 80, the blood pressure measurement would be referred to and written down as 120/80 ("120 over 80").

It is normal for blood pressure to change over the course of the day. It is usually lowest when a person is sleeping or at rest and rises when a person is active, nervous or anxious. For the most part, blood pressure stays the same during the day when a person is sitting or standing in one place. A blood pressure reading of 120/80 or below

is considered normal. Generally, the lower the blood pressure is the better; however, very low blood pressure can also be of concern and should be checked out by a physician.

How is blood pressure checked?

Individuals should have their blood pressure checked regularly during a routine visit to the doctor's office. Blood pressure readings are usually taken sitting or lying down so that the patient is relaxed. When checking blood pressure, the doctor or nurse will use a stethoscope, a gauge and blood pressure cuff (also called a sphygmomanometer -- sfing-mo-ma-NOM-e-ter). Now, that's a mouthful! For an accurate reading, it is best to not drink coffee or other caffeinated beverages 30 minutes before having blood pressure checked.

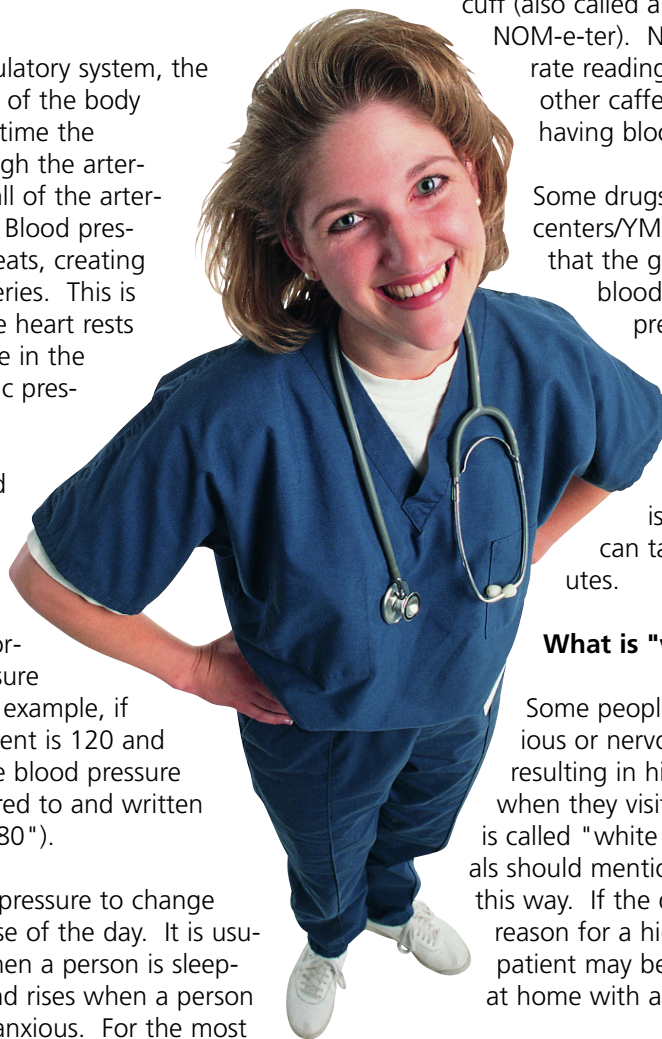
Some drugstores and community centers/YMCAs have blood pressure machines that the general public can use to check their blood pressure quickly and easily. Blood pressure monitors can also be purchased at pharmacies for home use. Another way to check blood pressure away from the doctor's office is by using an ambulatory blood pressure monitor. This device is worn for 24 hours at a time and can take blood pressure every 30 minutes.

What is "white coat" hypertension?

Some people have a tendency to become anxious or nervous when they visit the doctor, resulting in high blood pressure readings only when they visit the doctor's office. This condition is called "white coat" hypertension. These individuals should mention to the doctor if they are feeling this way. If the doctor suspects this is the underlying reason for a high blood pressure reading, the patient may be asked to check their blood pressure at home with a home monitor.

What is considered high blood pressure?

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is when a person's level stays consistently high at 140/90 or higher. Only a



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doctor can determine if someone has high blood pressure. Most doctors will check blood pressure several times on different days before deciding that the person definitively has a problem with high blood pressure.

What are the risks associated with high blood pressure?

Often known as the "silent killer," high blood pressure is usually without symptoms until it leads to heart, brain or kidney problems. High blood pressure indicates that the heart is working harder than it needs to, causing extra strain on both the arteries and the heart and increasing a person's risk of a heart attack or stroke. Since the heart is a muscle like any other muscle in the body, it grows larger in size as it is exerting force and straining. If someone has high blood pressure, their heart can get larger, and this enlarged heart condition can lead to heart failure.

Without treatment, high blood pressure can specifically cause small bulges (called aneurysms) to form in blood vessels, blood vessels in the kidney to narrow (causing kidney failure) and arteries throughout the body to become more susceptible to hardening (causing a heart attack, stroke, kidney failure or amputation). The good news is high blood pressure as a condition is highly treatable with lifestyle changes (such as diet and exercise) and, in some cases - medication.

Who gets high blood pressure?

The risk of developing high blood pressure increases if the person is overweight, has a family history of high blood pressure, is a man over the age of 45, is a woman over the age of 55, eats too much salt, drinks too much alcohol, is not exercising or is under constant stress.

What can a person do to lower their blood pressure?

One of the best ways to control high blood pressure is by making a few key lifestyle changes. These include losing excess weight and maintaining a healthy weight through adequate physical activity and a well-balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products (like the DASH eating plan). Other healthy habits include reducing dietary sodium, increasing dietary potassium, reducing saturated fats and moderating alcohol intake.

Sometimes blood pressure stays too high even when a person makes these kinds of healthy changes. In that case, a doctor may deem it necessary to

add medicine to the treatment regimen to help lower blood pressure. Blood pressure medicines work in different ways to lower blood pressure. Often, two or more drugs work better than one. Some drugs lower blood pressure by removing extra fluid and salt from your body. Others affect blood pressure by slowing down the heartbeat, or by relaxing and widening blood vessels.

What is the DASH eating plan?

"DASH" stands for "Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension," a clinical study that tested the effects of nutrients in food on blood pressure. Study results indicate that the best diet for reducing elevated blood pressures is one that includes whole grains, poultry, fish and nuts and has reduced amounts of fats, red meats, sweets and sugared beverages. DASH promotes healthy amounts of fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy foods along with reduced amounts of sodium. It's a great diet for anyone who wants to improve their health and nutrition.

How do I lower sodium in my diet?

If you are someone who reaches for the salt shaker at the start of each meal, the first step in reducing sodium intake in your diet is to banish the salt shaker to the back of the pantry, or throw it out altogether. Next, look for fragrant, tasty spices to add flavor to food without using salt. There are many spices to choose from to enhance the flavor of any food—experiment and find your favorite. Many pre-packaged "convenience" foods like snack foods, lunchmeats and meals that come in a box have high sodium content. Be sure to check the nutritional label on the package to locate products lower in sodium.

There are many spices and herbs that taste wonderful when paired with certain foods. Here are some examples of spices and herbs and the foods they compliment.

Chicken -- Ginger, marjoram, oregano, paprika, rosemary, sage, tarragon, thyme

Beef -- Bay leaf, marjoram, nutmeg, onion, pepper, sage, thyme

Pork -- Garlic, onion, sage, pepper, oregano

Fish -- Curry powder, dill, dry mustard, lemon juice, marjoram, paprika, pepper

Potatoes -- Dill, garlic, onion, paprika, parsley, sage

Green Beans -- Dill, curry powder, lemon juice, marjoram, oregano, tarragon, thyme

Carrots -- Cinnamon, cloves, marjoram, nutmeg, rosemary, sage

Tomatoes -- Basil, bay leaf, dill, marjoram, onion, oregano, parsley, pepper

What is the difference between salt and sodium?

The chemical name for salt is sodium chloride (NaCl), so salt is partly sodium. However, when it comes to choosing a diet that helps lower blood pressure, there really isn't any difference between salt and sodium.