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FHN

High blood pressure:

.....
**a prevalent
problem**



A prevalent problem

73,000,000

– That’s how many people in the United States are affected by hypertension — more commonly known as high blood pressure. That’s one in three adults. It’s a staggering number, and one that shows the dramatic impact this condition has on our families, our workplaces and our society.

High blood pressure is also estimated to affect about two million American teens and children. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, many are under-diagnosed.

So what do I need to know?

Hypertension is clearly a major public health problem ... and a challenge faced daily by you or someone you know. Your best strategy? Know your blood pressure and have it measured on a regular basis. Learn all you can about this condition. And then take action. Armed with knowledge and determination from the Get Fit Challenge, you can make a positive impact on your blood pressure outlook.

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure refers to the force of blood pushing against artery walls as it travels through the body. Like air in a tire or water in a hose, blood fills arteries to a certain capacity. Just as too much air pressure can damage a tire or too much water pushing through a garden hose can damage the hose, high blood pressure can threaten healthy arteries. Over time, this can cause conditions such as heart disease and stroke.

What is normal blood pressure?

Normal blood pressure is about 90/60 at birth, rising steadily to near 120/80 in a healthy adult. This measurement changes based on your activity. For example, if you took your blood pressure immediately after you’d delivered a speech or jogged a long distance, the reading would probably seem high. It’s natural for blood pressure to go up and down with changes in activity or emotions. But consistently high readings are cause for concern ... and action.

What do the measurements mean?

- **Normal:** Less than 120/80
- **Prehypertension:** 120-139/80-89
- **Stage 1 high blood pressure:** 140-159/90-99
- **Stage 2 high blood pressure:** 160 and above/100 and above

What are the major risk factors?

The exact causes of high blood pressure are not known, and vary among individuals. Several factors and conditions may play a role in its development, including:

- Smoking
- Being overweight or obese
- Lack of physical activity
- Too much salt and/or fat in the diet
- Too much alcohol consumption (more than 1 to 2 drinks per day)
- Stress
- Older age (starting as young as 35)
- Genetics
- African-American heritage
- Family history of high blood pressure and/or diabetes
- Chronic kidney disease
- Adrenal and thyroid disorders
- Pregnancy
- Use of birth control pills

Some of these factors are out of your control; others you can greatly influence by the choices you make every day. If you have several risk factors, be diligent about monitoring your blood pressure.

How important is heredity's role?

Sometimes people blame their genes for high blood pressure. Research indicates they are partly correct.

- A tendency toward heart disease or fatty buildups in arteries seems to be hereditary. That means children of parents with high blood pressure or cholesterol may be more likely to develop them.
- Race is also a factor. African Americans have higher risk of developing high blood pressure – which therefore increases their incidence of heart disease and stroke.
- A family history of diabetes or gout also increases the risk of heart disease.
- A number of genes have been reported to be associated with heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure in large population-based studies. However, the impact of each individual gene on an individual person is not fully understood.

What can I do to prevent or control high blood pressure?

- **Lose weight** if you are overweight or obese - being overweight can make you two to six times more likely to develop high blood pressure. Even small amounts of weight loss can make a big difference.
- **Stop smoking**, the sooner the better.
- **Eat a healthy diet**, including more fruits and vegetables and less saturated fat.
- **Get regular aerobic exercise**. People who are physically active have a lower risk of getting high blood pressure -- 20 to 50 percent lower -- than people who are not active.
- **Watch your salt intake** – less than a teaspoon a day is recommended. When people with high blood pressure cut back on salt, their blood pressure often falls.
- **De-stress** – yoga, deep breathing and regular exercise are all strategies to help lower your stress levels.
- **Take your medicine**, if it is prescribed.
- **Limit alcohol** to two drinks a day for men, one drink a day for women.

In addition to helping lower blood pressure, these measures enhance the effectiveness of high blood pressure drugs... so it is important to remember your daily routine directly impacts your health!



What do the numbers mean?

The top number: (systolic) measures your blood pressure when the heart is pumping blood forward into the arteries.

The bottom number: (diastolic) measures your blood pressure when the heart is relaxed, after the contraction. This is the lowest pressure to which the arteries are exposed.

Do certain vitamins and minerals help prevent high blood pressure?

Recent research suggests certain vitamins and minerals may play a role in helping to prevent high blood pressure. Ask your doctor or dietitian if you get enough of these in your diet:

- Potassium
- Calcium
- Magnesium
- Fish oils
- Garlic

Is it OK to check blood pressure at store kiosks or with at-home devices?

No doubt about it, the free blood pressure machines you can access in many stores are handy and convenient. However, unless they have been regularly maintained and recalibrated, their readings may not be accurate enough to make health decisions regarding your condition. In addition, the blood pressure cuffs on these do-it-yourself machines are often too small to get an accurate reading on a significant number of people with high blood pressure.

At-home devices can be helpful tools when recommended by your doctor. Brands vary dramatically. Shop around and ask for advice. The general rule? It is best to have your blood pressure checked in a medical facility or in a community screening program with trained staff.

The DASH Diet

The DASH Diet – Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension – is an eating plan that many experts believe lowers blood pressure effectively and quickly. In some studies, patients who were on the DASH diet reduced their blood pressure within two weeks.

Starting the DASH Diet

The DASH diet requires limiting sodium intake and calls for a certain number of daily servings from various food groups. The number of servings you require may vary, depending on your caloric need. When beginning the diet, start slowly and make gradual changes.

Consider adopting a diet plan that allows 2,400 milligrams of salt per day (about 1 teaspoon). Once your body has adjusted to the diet, further reduce your salt intake to 1,500 mg per day (about 2/3 teaspoon). These amounts include all salt consumed, including that in food products, used in cooking and added at the table.

Here is a list of food groups and suggested serving amounts for the DASH diet:

- **Grains:** 7-8 daily servings
- **Vegetables:** 4-5 daily servings
- **Fruits:** 4-5 daily servings
- **Low-fat or fat-free dairy products:** 2-3 daily servings
- **Meat, poultry and fish:** 2 or less daily servings
- **Nuts, seeds and dry beans:** 4-5 servings per week
- **Fats and oils:** 2-3 daily servings
- **Sweets:** try to limit to less than 5 servings per week

Tips:

- Eat more fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy foods
- Cut back on foods that are high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and total fat
- Eat more whole grain products, fish, poultry and nuts
- Eat less red meat and sweets
- Eat foods rich in magnesium, potassium and calcium

Lowering blood pressure on a tight budget

You might think it costs too much money to maintain a healthier lifestyle and lower your blood pressure. Expensive gym memberships, pricey produce and costly supplements are simply out of the question and beyond your budget. But many daily decisions can help keep your body and your bank account in good health. Consider these inexpensive strategies:

- Drink less alcohol
- Drink tap water instead of pop or sugary coffees
- Eat less meat
- Eat more beans --- they are healthy and cheap
- Buy frozen veggies and fruit
- Buy in bulk if you have the storage space
- Pack your lunch using your new Get Fit Challenge divided container – it costs less and often cuts calories
- Plant a garden
- Exercise at home or in your neighborhood
- Walk to work – and get exercise while you save on gas

Don't use the economy as an excuse for unhealthy choices. Remember, there is a high cost to illness, both literally and figuratively. You can improve your lifestyle without pillaging your pocketbook ... give it a try!

Blood Pressure Diary

Date	Reading
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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