Living Healthy with Hypertension

What is Hypertension and Why Should it be Treated?

Abstract: Approximately one in three Americans has hypertension. Do you know what to do if you are one of them?

Hypertension means high blood pressure. Blood pressure is the force of blood against blood vessel walls. There are two numbers in a blood pressure reading, a top number and a bottom number. For example 120/80. The top number, known as the systolic blood pressure, represents the force of blood against blood vessel walls when the heart beats. The bottom number, known as the diastolic blood pressure, represents the force of blood against blood vessel walls when the heart is at rest. One or both of these numbers may be elevated. If either of the numbers remains elevated over time (over 139 systolic or 89 diastolic) then you have high blood pressure or hypertension. However, in people with diabetes or chronic kidney diseases a systolic blood pressure over 129 or a diastolic blood pressure over 79 is considered high blood pressure. A doctor can confirm the diagnosis of hypertension through blood pressure measurements that are repeated over time. Hypertension is classified as stage 1 hypertension or stage 2 hypertension. Below are the blood pressure ranges measured in millimeters of mercury.

Stage	**Systolic Pressure (Top number of reading)**	**Diastolic Pressure (Bottom number of reading)**
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
Pre-Hypertension	120 to 139	80 to 89
Stage 1 Hypertension	140 to 159	90 to 99
Stage 2 Hypertension	160 or Over	100 or Over

If your systolic blood pressure is between 120 and 139 or your diastolic blood pressure is between 80 and 89 then you have what is called “pre-hypertension”. This does not mean that you have hypertension today but it does mean that you do not change your present behaviors (not exercising, eating too much of the wrong foods), you are likely to develop high blood pressure in the future. It is therefore important for you to make an effort to decrease your blood pressure to the “normal” range. Doing so will decrease your chance of developing hypertension and its associated complications.

What many people do not realize is that having uncontrolled blood pressure is very dangerous. It makes your heart work harder to pump blood to the rest of the body. Furthermore, it contributes to the hardening of arteries, also known as atherosclerosis. This hardening can cause heart attacks, strokes, and kidney failure and/or leg amputation. Hypertension can also lead to a condition known

as hypertensive heart disease. This is a condition in which the heart muscle gets thicker thereby decreasing its ability to pump blood. This condition may lead to heart failure. High blood pressure can cause aneurysms or small bulges to form in blood vessels. Theses can appear all over the body including the brain. Narrowing of the blood vessels found in the kidneys can occur in patients with high blood pressure and can lead to kidney failure. Additionally, high blood pressure can cause the blood vessels in the eyes to burst or bleed, which may cause loss of vision or even blindness.

Without proper testing, there is no way of knowing if you have hypertension. In fact hypertension is called the "silent killer" because most people have no symptoms until they develop life-threatening complications. The only way to know if you have hypertension is to have your blood pressure checked. High blood pressure can be controlled and its complications avoided with lifestyle changes and medication. Sometimes lifestyle changes alone are enough to bring blood pressure down to a normal range. Lifestyle changes include weight loss, exercise, a healthy eating plan, and reducing sodium intake, alcohol consumption, and stress. Remember, hypertension requires lifelong monitoring. Have you blood pressure checked at regular intervals and keep your blood pressure under control to help prevent the development of associated complications.

Complications Associated with Hypertension:

- Arteriosclerosis
- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Heart failure
- Kidney damage or failure
- Loss of vision or blindness

For more information, please consult the following websites:

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hbp/HBP_WhatIs.html

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/hbp/effect/effect.htm

http://www.cdc.gov/cvh/library/fs_bloodpressure.htm

http://www.diabetes.org/main/uedocuments/HighBloodPressure-English.pdf