Patient Handout

Managing Your High Blood Pressure

People of all ages must be careful to maintain their blood pressure at below 140/90 mmHg. If you have high blood pressure, you should be concerned about this threat to your health.

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, is dangerous. It makes your heart work too hard and contributes to hardening of the arteries. Hypertension increases your risk for heart disease and stroke, and it can lead to other conditions, such as heart failure, kidney disease and blindness.

Fortunately, high blood pressure can be controlled. Here are some guidelines to help you manage your high blood pressure on a day-to-day basis.

Maintain a Healthy Body Weight

Being overweight can increase your blood pressure. It also can encourage heart and lung diseases. Losing even 10 pounds can lower your blood pressure. If you have to lose weight, it's important to do it slowly. Don't try to lose more than 1 to 2 pounds a week. Begin with a goal of losing 10 percent of your current weight. This is the healthiest way to lose weight and offers you the best chance of keeping weight off.

When you are trying to lose weight, choose an eating plan that is lower in fat and calories than your current diet. Keeping a daily record of what you eat can identify times when you are prone to eat but aren't really hungry, or when you could substitute healthy foods.

Be Physically Active

The average adult needs half an hour of moderate exercise most days of the week to achieve and maintain health. The best way to initiate an exercise plan is to start slowly and work your way up to longer and harder activities. Choose something you enjoy. Some moderately paced activities are walking briskly, dancing, swimming, cycling or mowing the lawn.

Reduce Your Salt Intake

Lower the salt content in your diet. Many Americans eat too much salt, which drives up blood pressure. Most people should not eat more than about 1 teaspoon of table salt a day. Talk to your doctor about how much you should have.

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Reduce Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages

Too much alcohol can drive up blood pressure. If you drink alcoholic beverages, have only a moderate amount — one drink a day for women; two drinks a day for men.

What counts as a drink? 12 ounces of beer (regular or light, 150 calories), 5 ounces of wine (100 calories), or 1-2 ounces of 80-proof whiskey (100 calories).

Take Your Blood Pressure Medication As Directed

If you have high blood pressure, lifestyle changes may not lower your blood pressure adequately. If they don't, you will need to take medication in addition to the lifestyle changes. Doing both will help your medication work better and may minimize the amount of medication you need.

Many drugs are available to lower high blood pressure, and they work in various ways. Often, two or more drugs work better than one. Ask your health care provider to discuss the different options.

It's important that you take your medication as prescribed, including in the right amount.

Realize that your blood pressure may not be under control even if you are taking your medication as directed. If your blood pressure is still too high, talk with your health care provider about adjusting your medication or making further lifestyle changes to bring your blood pressure down to a healthy level. ■

Based on information from the National Institutes of Health. For more details, visit www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/hbp/intro.htm.

NOTES

Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.

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