

thinking ahead...



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May 9, 2011

WELLNESS WEEKLY

BLOOD PRESSURE

What causes an increase in blood pressure?

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

- Stress
- Older age
- Genetics
- Chronic kidney disease
- Adrenal and thyroid disorders
- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Lack of physical activity
- Too much salt in the diet
- Too much alcohol consumption

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against blood vessel walls. The heart pumps blood into the arteries (blood vessels), which carry the blood throughout the body. High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes the heart work harder to pump blood to the body and it contributes to hardening of the arteries and the development of heart failure.

About one in every four American adults has high blood pressure. High blood pressure is especially dangerous because it often gives no warning signs or symptoms. Fortunately, though, you can find out if you have high blood pressure by having your blood pressure checked regularly. If it is high, you can take steps to lower it. Just as important, if your blood pressure is normal, you can learn how to keep it from becoming high.

What are the symptoms?

There are usually no symptoms or signs of hypertension. In fact, nearly one-third of those who have it don't know it. The only way to know if you have hypertension definitely is to have your blood pressure checked.

If your blood pressure is extremely high, there may be certain symptoms to look out for, including:



- Severe headache
- Fatigue or confusion
- Vision problems
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Irregular heartbeat
- Blood in the urine

What is normal blood pressure?

Two numbers are recorded when measuring blood pressure. The top number, or systolic pressure, refers to the pressure inside the artery when the heart contracts and pumps blood through the body. The bottom number, or diastolic pressure, refers to the pressure inside the artery when the heart is at rest and is filling with blood.

- Normal: Less than 120/80
- Prehypertension: 120-139/80-89
- Stage 1 hypertension: 140-159/90-99
- Stage 2 hypertension: 160+/100+

How Can You Prevent High Blood Pressure?

Everyone--regardless of race, age, sex, or heredity--can help lower their chance of developing high blood pressure by taking the following steps:

- 1) Maintain a healthy weight
- 2) Be more physically active
- 3) Choose foods lower in salt and sodium
- 4) If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.
- 5) Don't smoke