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HYPERTENSION

Most adults have had the experience of visiting the doctor, and having a health professional wrap a blood pressure cuff around their arm to take a reading. Many times we are told the numbers, but not what doctors are looking for when they read them. One of the most important clinical items a physician looks at is your blood pressure – high or low – as a quick way to start looking at what is going on with your health. Hypertension (or high blood pressure) is a condition that affects one of every three Americans over forty. Of that number, roughly about a third manage their blood pressure well. But what constitutes “high” blood pressure, what are the consequences, and what can we do to lower the reading to normal range? Hypertension figures into great numbers of deaths per year, so it’s important to stay vigilant about it.

What is High Blood Pressure?

Hypertension is a condition that can manifest from a number of variables: genetic predisposition, temperament, obesity, cardiovascular disease, or other organ disease. The harder the heart has to work to keep blood flowing, the higher the pressures. The definition of hypertension has changed over the years, as researchers continue to find out more about risk factors for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

Most physicians now believe that a high reading is a consistent systolic (the top number) reading of 140 or more, and a diastolic reading over 90 (the bottom number). Anything over 220 in the systolic range is considered an emergency, and immediate care should be provided to the patient. The latest guidelines out for diabetic patients are somewhat stricter: 120/80 is the ideal for that population. I like to see most of my patients get to a consistent blood pressure of about 135/85: this kind of number is something we can achieve by utilizing several different methods.

Treatment for Hypertension

For people with high blood pressure, I advise several lifestyle changes that can benefit them greatly. Diet and nutrition is important, especially reduction of salt intake. Stress reduction is critical: not only do many of our unhealthy habits stem from stress, but stress also takes energy away from the healthy activities we like, and leaves us worn-out and feeling even MORE stressed. Anything enjoyable to you such as meditation, yoga, seeing friends and loved ones in relaxed settings, or a hobby you that relaxes you is something to incorporate into your daily life.

Hypertension has been proven as a factor in several common, life-threatening diseases, including stroke and heart attacks. When your doctor diagnoses you with hypertension, be sure to have an open discussion with him/her about other medications you may be taking, such as estrogen, birth control, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication. Talk openly with you doctor about these, and your lifestyle including alcohol abuse and smoking. Both alcohol and cigarettes greatly contribute to the problem.

Many studies have shown that longevity has a direct linear link to lower blood pressure, and that there is a lesser risk of heart attack, renal blockages, or stroke. In fact most people aren't aware that 15-20% of patients with hypertension have renal blockages (blockages in the arteries of the kidneys). The blockages are commonly treatable, and patients can benefit from stents placed in the renal arteries, if necessary. More and more often, the physician acts as investigator when looking at hypertension: hunting the cause, as high blood pressure is often an indicator of disease elsewhere in the body.

Dr. Galichia's Tips

Even 2-3 points lower in blood pressure is a boon to health. Your physician can tell you about different treatments: as pharmaceutical technologies advance, there are now many types of therapies to try. The most common pharmaceutical treatments for high blood pressure are: beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, ARBS, and ACE- inhibitors. My preference is that patients enact lifestyle changes along with medication, for the optimal success and benefit to their health.

My suggestion to every adult over 30-- especially those with a family history of heart disease, stroke, or diabetes—is to keep an eye on your blood pressure, and make sure that you and your physician discuss any and all changes in the essentials of your health (weight, medication, lifestyle changes, cholesterol, etc). A blood pressure reading is a simple, painless test to take. Could be the beginning of a healthier, more fulfilling life for you and your loved ones.

Listen to Dr. Galichia's Radio Show – "Take Your Health to Heart" every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to **GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com**. We would love to hear from you!!!

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