

## Managing Your Hypertension

By Charlotte Ruff, RN

Hypertension or high blood pressure has long been called "the silent killer" because a person can have it without experiencing any symptoms. However it is a major killer and can lead to stroke, heart disease, eye problems, and kidney disease.

About 33.3 percent of the general population have hypertension. It is highest in African Americans with 44 percent in males and 43.9 percent in females. African Americans are more likely to have hypertension or high blood pressure than whites, develop it earlier in life and have more severe cases.

Hypertension is a disease related to high pressure in the arteries of the circulatory system. Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. The readings or results are given in two numbers. The systolic is the top number and represents the pressure of the heart when it is beating. The diastolic or lower number is the pressure of the heart relaxed or resting. A normal pressure is 120 or less for the systolic and 80 or less for the diastolic. Numbers above these may indicate pre-hypertension or hypertension.

There are several risk factors for hypertension. Some are controllable. Others are not. Uncontrollable ones are race, heredity, and age. African Americans develop it earlier in life. It tends to be familial and age increases the risk. The good news is that hypertension can be prevented or if not it can be managed or controlled.

Controllable risk factors are:

1. **Being overweight** know the standard weight for your height and maintain a healthy weight
2. **Too much salt** - Salt makes the body retain fluid and increase the work of the heart. Read labels and avoid processed foods.
3. **Too much alcohol** - More than 2 drinks a day for men and 1 a day for women
4. Not getting enough **physical activity** Inactivity can lead to being overweight.
5. **Smoking** - Smoking raises the blood pressure by constricting the blood vessels
6. **Too much stress** - Stress can cause tension and raise the blood pressure

To prevent hypertension reduce the risk factors by:

1. Controlling your weight with daily exercise for 30 minutes or more
2. Eating a healthy diet. Less fried foods, butter, oils and fats.
3. Eating smaller portions.
4. Eating less red meat, more chicken and fish, selecting leaner cuts of meat and broiling or baking
5. Eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grain cereals, rice and bread.
6. Participating in stress reducing exercises and activities

Hypertension can be controlled or managed by taking the same measures used for prevention.

Medication may be required for some persons with a diagnosis of hypertension. And anyone with this diagnosis should be under the care of a doctor or other healthcare provider and have regular checkups. Each individual can take the responsibility for his or her own health and have a quality life by practicing a healthy lifestyle. And if diagnosed with a disease, understand it, follow the orders of your health care providers and use the best health practices.