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Normal Blood Pressure

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Normal Blood Pressure

Normal blood pressure is vital for good health. Blood pressure is the pressure from the pumping heart that pushes the blood through veins and arteries. Blood carries oxygen and nutrients to all parts of your body.

Blood is made up mostly of water. If the body's water level drops, it affects blood pressure. Water is lost through sweat, urine, breath and bowel movements. Lost water needs to be replaced. Drink about 8 cups of fluid each day to keep up with normal fluid losses.

The kidneys clean the blood. If blood flow to the kidneys slows down, the kidneys act as if the body is low on water. The kidneys send a message to the blood vessels to constrict (get smaller). This constriction saves water and raises the blood pressure until fluids are replaced and normal pressure returns.

Problems

On-going high blood pressure is called hypertension. Hypertension puts a lot of stress on the blood vessels, heart and kidneys. It is a risky disease that may cause a stroke, heart attack and/or kidney disease.

A diet high in fat and cholesterol can lead to hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis). This disease causes the arteries to become blocked. Clogged or partly blocked arteries reduce blood flow to the kidneys.

Even though the body's water level is normal, the kidneys will react to low blood flow and will send out a signal to increase blood pressure.

You have a greater risk of getting high blood pressure if you

- Have a family history of high blood pressure
- Are African American
- Are overweight
- Have chronic kidney (renal) disease
- Are over age 50

Symptoms of high blood pressure include headaches or swelling. However, it is possible to have high blood pressure without any symptoms. You can find out if you have high blood pressure by having your blood pressure checked regularly by a doctor or other trained health care professional.

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A blood pressure reading of 140/90 mm Hg or higher, on two or more readings, is considered high blood pressure (hypertension). A blood pressure reading of 120-139/80-89, on two or more readings, is considered prehypertension. This term means that you don't have high blood pressure now but that you are likely to develop it in the future. You can avoid getting high blood pressure by eating wisely and being active.

Diet and Exercise

If you have high blood pressure, ask your doctor about:

- **Salt.** Some people have higher blood pressure when they use salt and may need to reduce their salt intake.
- **Potassium.** Some people need to increase their potassium level by eating foods high in potassium or by taking a prescribed medicine.
- **Calcium.** Some people have better control of their blood pressure when they eat a high calcium diet.
- **Weight loss.** If you are overweight you may need to slowly lose extra pounds (½ to 1 pound per week).
- **Physical Activity.** Regular physical activity can help reduce body fat and improve overall health. Too much body fat puts pressure on the blood vessels and can lead to high blood pressure. A weight loss of as little as 10 pounds (or 5 percent of your body weight) can help lower blood pressure.

| Dietary sources of salt, potassium and calcium. | | |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Salt | Potassium | Calcium |
| Condiments | Oranges and orange juice | Low fat milk |
| Cured Meats | Bananas | Low fat yogurt |
| Canned Soups | Tomatoes | Cheese |
| Prepared sauces, gravies and mixes | Greens | Salmon with bones |

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