

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HYPERTENSION

Most people with hypertension have no signs or symptoms, even if blood pressure readings reach dangerously high levels. But *silence isn't golden*. High Blood Pressure is truly the **SILENT KILLER**.

Blood pressure is a measurement of the amount of blood your heart is pumping and the amount of resistance to the blood flowing in your arteries. The more blood your heart pumps and the narrower your arteries, the higher your blood pressure.

SCREENING AND DIAGNOSIS

Blood pressure is measured with an inflatable arm cuff and a pressure-measuring gauge. A blood pressure reading, given in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg), has two numbers. The first, or upper, number measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats or works (**systolic** pressure). The second, or lower, number measures the pressure in your arteries between beats (**diastolic** pressure) during the heart's resting time.

* **Normal blood pressure** is **below** 120/80 mm Hg — Once blood pressure rises above 115/75 mm Hg, the risk of cardiovascular disease begins to increase.

* **Pre-hypertension** is a systolic pressure ranging from 120 to 139 **or** a diastolic pressure ranging from 80 to 89. Pre-hypertension tends to get worse over time. Within four years of being diagnosed with pre-hypertension, nearly one in three adults ages 35 to 64 and nearly one in two adults age 65 or older progress to definite high blood pressure.

Both numbers in a blood pressure reading are important. But after age 50, the systolic reading is even more significant. The most common type of high blood pressure among people older than 50 is when the systolic pressure is high but the diastolic pressure is normal.. One single high blood pressure reading usually isn't enough for a diagnosis. Because blood pressure normally varies throughout the day — and sometimes specifically during visits to the doctor — diagnosis is based on more than one reading taken on more than one occasion.

COMPLICATIONS

Extra pressure on the artery walls over time can damage your vital organs. The higher your blood pressure and the longer it goes uncontrolled, the greater the damage. Uncontrolled hypertension can lead to :

- * **Damage to your arteries.** This can result in hardening and thickening of the arteries (atherosclerosis), which can lead to a heart attack or other complications. An enlarged, bulging blood vessel (aneurysm) also is possible.
- * **Heart failure.** To pump blood against the higher pressure in your vessels, your heart muscle thickens. Eventually, the thickened muscle may have a hard time pumping enough blood to meet your body's needs, which can lead to heart failure.
- * **A blocked or ruptured blood vessel in your brain.** This can lead to stroke.
- * **Cognitive impairment and dementia** are more common in people who have high blood pressure. Uncontrolled high blood pressure may affect your ability to think, remember and learn.

TREATMENT

Treating high blood pressure can help prevent serious — even life-threatening — complications. Your doctor also may suggest steps to control conditions that can contribute to high blood pressure, such as diabetes and high cholesterol.

Changing your lifestyle can go a long way toward controlling high blood pressure. But sometimes lifestyle changes aren't enough. In addition to self care, your doctor may recommend medication to lower your blood pressure. Remember, early intervention can prevent the complications.

SELF-CARE - WHAT YOU CAN DO TO CONTROL HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Lifestyle changes can help you prevent and control high blood pressure — even if you're taking blood pressure medication. Here's what you can do:

- * Eat healthy foods. Try the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, which emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy foods. Go on-line to www.dashdiet.org . Eat less saturated fat and total fat. Limit the amount of sodium in your diet. **Read your food labels!** A session with a Registered Dietitian can help you more easily adjust your eating pattern for better health.

- * Maintain a healthy weight.. If you're overweight, losing even 5 pounds can lower your blood pressure.

- * Increase physical activity. Regular physical activity can help lower your blood pressure and keep your weight under control. Try for at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day.

- * Limit alcohol. Even if you're healthy, alcohol can raise your blood pressure. If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation — up to one drink a day for women, two drinks a day for men.

- * Don't smoke. Tobacco injures blood vessel walls and speeds up the process of hardening of the arteries. If you smoke, ask your doctor to help you quit.

- * Reduce Sodium (salt) intake. Too much sodium in your diet can lead to retaining fluids and hypertension.

The best thing about doing these self care activities is that Hypertension is only one of the many conditions that will be healthfully affected. You will be surprised how much better you will feel after a few weeks of these lifestyle changes.

COPING SKILLS

High blood pressure isn't a problem that you can treat and then ignore. It's a condition you need to manage for the rest of your life.

To keep your blood pressure under control:

- * Measure your blood pressure at home. Home blood pressure monitoring can help you keep closer tabs on your blood pressure, show if medication is working, and even alert you and your doctor to potential complications. Also attend blood pressure clinics and keep a record of results for your doctor. Ask your parish health ministry team to show you how and when to use your blood pressure machine correctly.

- * Take your medications properly. If side effects or costs pose problems, don't stop taking your medications. Ask your doctor about other options. If you tend to forget your medication, consider using a pill dispenser. Fill it weekly (or monthly) and always keep it next to where you sit to eat your meals.

- * Schedule regular doctor visits. It takes a team effort to treat high blood pressure successfully. Your doctor can't do it alone, and neither can you. Work with your doctor to bring your blood pressure to a safe level — and keep it there.

- * Manage stress. Reduce stress as much as possible. Practice healthy coping techniques, such as muscle relaxation and slow, deep breathing. Take a walk. Getting plenty of sleep can help, too. Say no to extra tasks, release negative thoughts, maintain good relationships, and remain patient and optimistic.

Sticking with all this can be difficult — especially if you don't see or feel any symptoms of high blood pressure. If you need motivation, remember the risks associated with uncontrolled high blood pressure. It may help to enlist the support of your family and friends as well. Feel free to bring your questions and concerns to the St. James health ministry team. Have your blood pressure checked at every opportunity.

We will be having a screening clinic at various times and on most United Service Sundays after church.