

What is Hypertension?

Hypertension is a dangerous condition because there are few recognizable symptoms. Sometimes when blood pressure is very high, some people experience headaches and dizziness, but oftentimes there is no indication at all. Therefore, diagnosis requires that blood pressure be taken regularly, preferably not only in the doctor's office. Many pharmacies have a free blood pressure cuff to measure this important indicator of circulatory health. Another way of describing "blood pressure" is the force required to pump the blood through the body.

Systolic and Diastolic Blood Pressure Measurements

There are two blood pressure measurements, systolic - when the heart muscle is contracting, and diastolic - when the heart is relaxing between beats. Ideally, blood pressure should be no higher than 120 over 80. As we age, the arteries stiffen, and blood pressure rises, so that the heart must work harder to pump the blood. Many people require multiple medications to control blood pressure.

Salt and Hypertension

As with many cardiovascular conditions, diet plays an enormous role. Too much salt or sodium in the diet can lead to hypertension or high blood pressure. Exercise can help the arteries relax. It is always preferable to prevent hypertension or reduce it by lifestyle changes, rather than to take a greater number and higher doses of medications, many of which have unpleasant side effects.

Small steps help. For example, if we eat breads several times day, that can add up to a lot of sodium. Check labels to find lower-sodium varieties and try to scale down or find a substitute fruit or uncooked vegetable instead. One 2 oz serving or 6 thin slices of cold cuts and cured meats can contain as much as half of your daily recommended dietary sodium. Again, find lower sodium alternatives or look for healthier substitutes. If you are trying to control your cholesterol, avoid this type of cold cut completely.

Did you know that a slice of pizza with several toppings can contain more than half of your daily recommended dietary sodium? Or, that sodium levels in poultry can vary based on preparation methods. Choose wisely. The sodium in one cup of canned soup can range from 100 to as much as 940 mg of sodium. Again, that's more than half of your recommended daily intake. Check the labels to find lower sodium options. A sandwich or burger from a fast food restaurant can contain more than 100 percent of daily suggested dietary sodium. Try half a sandwich with a side of salad instead.

Risks of Chronic Hypertension?

Chronic and uncontrolled hypertension can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure, aneurysms, kidney failure, peripheral disease, and weakening of the entire system.