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Hypertension and Weight Loss

Definition

Increased body weight is a strong risk factor for hypertension (high blood pressure). Losing even a moderate amount of weight can have a positive impact on preventing and treating hypertension.

Description

A person's blood pressure is determined by the amount of blood pumped, by the actions of the heart, and by the size and condition of the arteries. Slight narrowing of the arteries increases resistance to blood flow, which increases blood pressure. While there is no known cause for most cases of hypertension, excess weight puts additional strain on the heart and losing weight often helps to prevent and treat elevated blood pressure.



Clinical guidelines recommend that quitting smoking, healthy eating, reducing dietary sodium and alcohol intake, regular physical activity and achieving a healthy body weight are all effective in lowering blood pressure. Every 1 percent reduction in body weight lowers systolic blood pressure by an average of 1 mmHg.¹ Losing 4.5 kg reduces blood pressure or prevents hypertension in a large proportion of overweight people, while losing 10 kg can reduce systolic blood pressure by 6-10 mmHg.

DASH

Clinical trials have shown that following a particular eating plan, called the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan, and reducing the amount of sodium consumed can significantly lower elevated blood pressure. This specific diet is more effective than standard weight loss diets at reducing high blood pressure. The DASH diet is high in fresh fruits and vegetables and low fat dairy products. The diet also contains whole grain products, fish, poultry and nuts. It is low in fat, salt and refined carbohydrates e.g. cakes, biscuits, sweets and sugary drinks. The DASH diet is rich in magnesium, potassium and calcium as well as protein and fibre.

NOTE: To access a free copy of the DASH eating plan go to the website of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute: www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Treatment options

As with all conditions your Doctor should be consulted to diagnose and treat Hypertension. If your blood pressure is elevated but not dangerously high your Doctor may recommend a program of

weight loss and regular physical activity to help prevent the need for medication. If medication is required then losing weight while taking the medication may reduce your need for the medication over time.

Diet hints

- * To help reduce high blood pressure, ensure that your diet includes mostly plant-based foods. These include fruit, vegetables and legumes (dried peas, beans and lentils).
- * Avoid white flour-based products and choose whole grain products instead such as whole meal bread and pasta and brown rice.
- * Include moderate amounts of lean meat, poultry and fish in your diet. Choose only lean meat and trim away any visible fat. Remove skin from chicken. To reduce fat intake avoid frying these foods.
- * Include low fat or fat free dairy food in your diet.
- * Nuts, seeds and dried beans are a good source of protein, fibre and minerals. Include 1/3 cup of these in your diet 3 or 4 times per week.
- * Avoid butter and use vegetable oil spreads instead. Cook with vegetable oil such as olive, corn, canola or safflower oil.
- * Limit your intake of sweets and sugary drinks to a small amount 3 or 4 times a week. Ensure that any sweets you do eat are low fat, e.g. jelly, jelly beans, sorbet, jam etc.

Pharmacist's advice

Ask your Pharmacist for advice.

- 1) Follow the Diet Hints.
- 2) If you want a copy of the DASH eating plan and do not have access to the internet, please ask your Pharmacist for assistance.
- 3) Regular physical activity helps to protect the heart and reduce high blood pressure. 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise on five or more days of the week is recommended. See your Doctor before beginning an exercise routine.
- 4) Limit your intake of alcohol. Men should drink no more than 21 units of alcohol per week (and no more than 4 units in any one day). Women should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week (and no more than 3 units in any one day).
- 5) Ask your Pharmacist for advice about how to quit smoking. Hypertension puts a strain on the heart and smoking increases a person's risk of heart attack or stroke by 3 to 4 times that of a non-smoker.
- 6) Your Pharmacist can recommend and demonstrate how to use a suitable device for you to measure your blood pressure at home.
- 7) If your diet is inadequate consider some nutritional supplements. Healthy blood pressure depends upon an adequate intake of potassium, magnesium and calcium.

DISCLAIMER : This information is an educational aid only. It is not intended to replace medical advice for individual conditions or treatments. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist, nurse or naturopath before following any medical regimen to see whether it is safe and effective for you.