



Fall/Winter 2017 Newsletter

HYPERTENSION: THE SILENT KILLER

Within the medical community high blood pressure, or hypertension, is known as “The Silent Killer” because it often develops slowly over time without producing any obvious symptoms or concerns in the patient. It is estimated that 1 in 3 adults in the US has hypertension, but 30% of those individuals do not even realize that their blood pressure is too high. Uncontrolled hypertension dramatically increases your risk of stroke, heart attack, vision loss, kidney failure, and peripheral vascular disease.

WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE?

Your blood pressure is a measure of the force of the blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. When a medical professional reports your blood pressure to you, it is a combination of two numbers. The top number is called the systolic blood pressure, and it is a measure of the pressure inside your arteries when your heart is contracting or beating; this number should ideally be less than 120. The bottom number is called the diastolic blood pressure, and it is a measure of the pressure inside your arteries when your heart is relaxed between beats; this number should ideally be less than 80. Hypertension is diagnosed when a person’s average blood pressure is greater than 140/90.

WHAT CAUSES HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

A number of factors can cause hypertension, including narrowing of the arteries, a greater than normal volume of blood in the body, or the heart beating faster or more forcefully than it should. Increasing age, obesity, black race, and family history of hypertension can all contribute to the development of these problems, and therefore to hypertension.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY BLOOD PRESSURE?

There are many things you can do to maintain a healthy blood pressure, including maintaining a healthy weight, reducing the amount of salt in your diet, cutting back on alcohol consumption, exercising for at least 30 minutes per day on at least 4 day per week, and eating a healthy diet of lean protein, low-fat dairy, and lots of fruits and vegetables.

It is also important to check your blood pressure periodically. This is why our clinic staff checks your blood pressure at the start of your office visit. You can also stop by the clinic during our normal business hours just to have your blood pressure checked. You may consider purchasing a blood pressure cuff to check your own blood pressures at home, but it is recommended that you check product reviews or ask for guidance from a pharmacist or medical provider prior to deciding on a specific blood pressure machine. Most importantly, if your provider starts you on a blood pressure medicine, take it correctly!

PRESCRIPTION SAFETY TIPS

KNOW YOUR MEDS:

- Bring a new, complete list of all prescription, over the counter, and nutritional supplement medications to all visits, and take the time to review these medications in detail with nursing staff.
- Know the condition that each of your medications is used to treat.
- Use only one pharmacy so that your pharmacist has a complete list of all prescription medications, which helps to ensure your safety.

ASK QUESTIONS:

- How much of the medication should you take and how often?
- What is the brand name and what is the generic name of the medication?
- Is there a best time to take the medication?
- How long will you need to take the medication?
- What are the possible side effects of the medication?
- Does the medication interact with other medications or any foods?
- What should you do if you miss a dose of medication?
- Could you become tolerant, dependent or addicted to the medication?
- Should you continue all of your other medications as before?

CHANGING PAP SMEAR GUIDELINES

Many women remember the days when a Pap smear was an annual event.

A Pap smear is an important screening test for women that involves a vaginal swab to detect abnormal cells, which may represent cervical cancer.

While the Pap smear test remains our greatest weapon in detecting cervical cancer in women, you may have noticed that Pap smear testing guidelines have been changing over the past few years.

Current recommendations indicate that Pap smears should be completed only every 3 years in women aged 21 to 65 with no history of cervical cancer or abnormal Pap smears in the past.

Women aged 30 to 65 may even be able to stretch their Pap smear tests to once every 5 years if an additional lab test to specifically identify the presence of Human Papilloma Virus (referred to as co-testing) comes back negative.

Screening recommendations vary for some women, including those who have had abnormal Pap smears in the past, a history of cervical cancer, a history of hysterectomy, exposure to a chemical known as DES, or those who are immunocompromised.

Women are encouraged to speak with their medical provider for guidance on their specific Pap smear recommendations.

NOVEMBER IS DIABETES

Diabetes is a chronic illness affecting an estimated 30 million Americans, 25% of whom are undiagnosed. Chances are good that you or someone you care about suffers from this disease.

Diabetes is a disorder of the body's normal ability to process food energy. In people with diabetes, the body is not able to process sugars appropriately, and as such, the amount of sugar circulating in the blood is higher than normal.

This excess sugar circulating in the blood can be very dangerous if it is not controlled. Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure, leg amputations and adult-onset blindness. Diabetics are about 3 times more likely to suffer from a heart attack or stroke as compared to non-diabetics, and diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States.

Diabetes is diagnosed with bloodwork. Usually, a test called a metabolic panel reveals an elevated blood sugar (>100 mg/dL if patient is fasting), which triggers the provider to order a special test called a hemoglobin A1C, which is a measure of the patient's average blood sugar over the prior 3 months. If the A1C is above 6.5, the patient is diagnosed as diabetic. If the A1C is between 5.7 and 6.4, the patient is at risk for developing diabetes (sometimes referred to as pre-diabetic). Other risk factors for developing diabetes include being overweight, over 45 years of age, family history of diabetes, and exercising less than 3 times per week.

Many people who suffer from diabetes have no symptoms, especially early on in the disease process. As such, it is important to be seen by your medical provider at least once a year for a general physical. At this appointment, discuss your diabetes risk factors with your medical provider and ask if testing is recommended to check for high blood sugar.

If you have been diagnosed as diabetic, it is important to follow a healthy diet, get plenty of exercise, maintain a normal weight, take your medicine, and follow up regularly with your provider.

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