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Lowering the Pressure

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HEALTHY CHOICES

Hypertension is one to two times greater in sedentary persons than active individuals.

Lowering the Pressure

Potassium-rich fruits and vegetables lower blood pressure.

About one in every four adults in the U.S. has high blood pressure. Because there are no symptoms, many people don't know they have high blood pressure. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to heart attack, stroke, heart failure or kidney failure. This is why high blood pressure is called the "silent killer."

High blood pressure, which is considered 140/90 mm Hg or higher, is more common in persons older than 35 years, in African-Americans, persons overweight, the elderly and heavy drinkers. People with diabetes, gout or kidney disease are also more likely to have high blood pressure. About 150,000 people die each year in the U.S. from strokes due to high blood pressure, and many more have non-fatal strokes that leave them disabled.

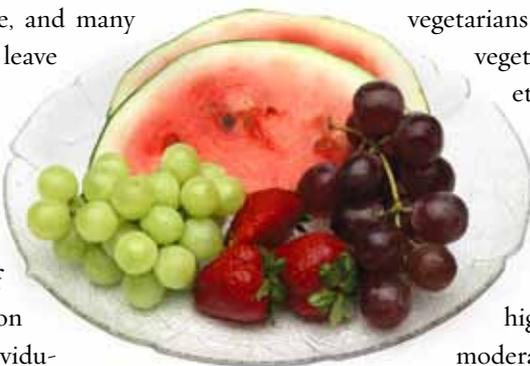
Antihypertensive drugs are commonly used, but these have undesirable side effects. Weight control is the single most important factor in the prevention of hypertension, and weight reduction in hypertensive overweight individuals offers the most effective non-drug means of decreasing blood pressure. Other important modalities include elimination of alcohol and sodium restriction. The average American typically consumes about six to eight times the amount of sodium needed per day. Using processed food significantly increases your daily sodium intake.

Regular exercise helps lower blood pressure. It is important for effective stress management, another risk factor for high blood pressure. Blood pressure in hypertensives is normally lowered 3 to 6 mm Hg by an increased calcium intake. In the Nurses' Health Study there was a 23 percent reduction in risk of high blood pressure associated with a regular calcium intake of at least 800 mg/day compared to

an intake below 400 mg/day. Cheese, wine and chocolate should be avoided by sensitive individuals and those using mood elevators, since these foods can raise blood pressure.

In the Adventist Health Study, non-vegetarians had a risk of fatal stroke that was 20 to 30 percent higher than the vegetarians. The lower blood pressure levels seen in vegetarians may result in part from the fact that vegetarians are leaner. In addition, vegetarian diets are low in saturated fat and rich in fruits and vegetables, excellent sources of potassium and magnesium that lower blood pressure. During an intensive two-week live-in program, a low-fat, high-fiber vegan diet, combined with moderate exercise and stress management, reduced blood pressure five to seven percent in middle-aged men and women.

A diet providing substantial levels of potassium and calcium, and with reduced saturated and total fat, has an anti-hypertensive effect, in both normotensives and hypertensives, comparable to that achieved with many pharmacological interventions. After three weeks, a diet containing ten servings per day of fruits and vegetables and two to three servings per day of low-fat dairy products reduced systolic and diastolic blood pressure by 5.5 mm and 3.0 mm Hg, respectively. Much greater reductions in blood pressures were seen in the hypertensive subgroup.



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