



MERCY MEDICAL GROUP

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

DESCRIPTION

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of the arteries. These are the vessels that carry blood from the heart to the rest of the body. A blood pressure reading involves two numbers. The first number measures the force of the blood as the heart pumps. The second number is the force between beats, when the heart is resting. Normal blood pressure is 120/80. If repeated checks show that your blood pressure is over 140/90, you may have high blood pressure. You may have a different goal depending on your age and your other health problems.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Typically mild to moderate high blood pressure causes no symptoms. For this reason it is called “the silent killer”. Severe hypertension may cause headaches, changes in vision, dizziness, racing or irregular heart beat, easy tiring, nosebleeds, chest pain or shortness of breath.

RISK FACTORS

- Increasing age
- Family history
- African-American descent
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Obesity
- A high salt diet
- Smoking.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Narrowing of blood vessels, which reduces the flow of blood (this may eventually cause a heart attack, stroke, blindness or poor circulation to the limbs)
- Damage to the kidneys, which may cause blood pressure to rise even higher
- Weakening of the walls of arteries, which may cause them to rupture (this usually happens in the brain or abdomen)
- Weakening of heart muscle due to an overworked heart.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Stop smoking
- Reduce weight to a normal range
- Reduce salt (sodium) intake to less than 2,000 mg per day
- Exercise on a regular basis as advised by your physician
- Reduce alcohol and caffeine intake
- Monitor your blood pressure regularly so that medical treatment can be started or changed before complications develop. Ask your physician how often he or she wishes you to check your blood pressure reading.

EVALUATION AND TREATMENT

- Tests to diagnose the cause and severity of your high blood pressure may include blood tests, urine studies, chest X-ray and EKG
- Regular visits to your physician for assessment of control and discussion of possible side effects from medications
- Your physician may ask you to purchase a blood pressure measuring device for monitoring at home
- Medications need to be taken on a daily basis for control of blood pressure. Medications cannot be taken on an “as needed” basis
- Ask your health care professional when and how to take your medication.

CONSIDER NOTIFYING YOUR PHYSICIAN IF:

- Your home blood pressure readings are frequently outside the range established by your doctor
- Your blood pressure medications cause shortness of breath, chest pain, severe lightheadedness, cold arms or legs or any other symptom that you find uncomfortable
- You are considering the use of over-the-counter cold/allergy preparations or pain medications other than acetaminophen (Tylenol).