

Hypertension – The Silent Killer

Author: Robert G. Good, DO, MACOI, Internal Medicine, Carle Mattoon

High blood pressure (Hypertension) is the root cause of many end of life or disabling events, including stroke, heart attack, kidney failure, and chronic heart failure. It is defined as a blood pressure greater than 130/85 (Stage 1) with Stage 2 greater than 140/90. Over the years, the data has shown a greater need to treat blood pressure more aggressively, as treated high blood pressure significantly reduces the risk of the events described above.

High blood pressure is a chronic condition that may start very early in life. Most people with diagnosed hypertension have had progressive elevation of blood pressure over a lifetime, often going back to high school. By the time that a physician makes a diagnosis and begins treatment, it is often time years later and chronic damage has been done to the arteries and heart. An effort has been made by the American Heart Association to begin treatment much earlier in life to prevent vascular damage.

Initial treatment of high blood pressure should focus on lifestyle changes of diet and exercise. We know that a diet high in salt and caffeine can increase blood pressure significantly. A younger person may need no other treatment than dietary adjustments to prevent chronic damage. Exercise and prevention of excessive weight gain also are helpful in controlling blood pressure. For every inch of fat that we accumulate is an extra mile of blood vessels for the heart to pump blood through.

The rural communities have 10% increased incidence of high blood pressure as compared to the urban community. And this is supported by the increased incidence of heart disease and stroke in rural America. ***It is critical that blood pressure be controlled*** – and it is always controllable through medication and diet. However, about 8-9% of the population has resistant high blood pressure to typical medications that is related to other medical conditions. These conditions are also treatable but usually takes additional investigation to get a clear diagnosis.

There are many inexpensive medications to control elevated blood pressure. It may take 3 medications in combination to achieve adequate control, but this is life and organ saving to do so.

Bottom line –

- 1) Make sure that you get a blood pressure check at least every year
- 2) Make sure that the cuff size and technique is proper to get an accurate reading
- 3) Make sure that your blood pressure is controlled (certainly less than 140/90 mm Hg) – It can be done.

For more information, please contact the Carle Center for Rural Health and Farm Safety at 365-7961 or visit www.carle.org/farmsafety.