5 Surprising Facts About High Blood Pressure

What you don't know about high blood pressure could hurt you.

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Uncontrolled high blood pressure raises the risk for heart disease and stroke, which are leading causes of death in the United States. Fortunately, high blood pressure is treatable and preventable. To lower your risk, get your blood pressure checked regularly and take action to control your blood pressure if it is too high.

1. High blood pressure may be linked to dementia.

Recent studies show that high blood pressure is linked to a higher risk for dementia, a loss of cognitive function.[2] Timing seems to matter: Some evidence suggests having uncontrolled high blood pressure during midlife (age 45 to 65) creates a higher risk for dementia later in life.[3] The takeaway? It's never too early to start thinking about your blood pressure and taking steps to manage it.

2. Young people can have high blood pressure, too.

High blood pressure doesn't just happen to older adults. About one in four men and nearly one in five women age 35 to 44 has high blood pressure.[4]

High blood pressure is a leading cause of stroke, a condition that is on the rise among younger people. Experts think the increased risk for stroke among young adults is a direct result of the rising rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes—conditions that are preventable and treatable.

Younger people should get their blood pressure checked at least once each year. You can get your blood pressure checked at a doctor's office, a pharmacy, or at many grocery stores.

3. High blood pressure usually doesn't have any symptoms.

High blood pressure is sometimes called the "silent killer." Most people with high blood pressure don't have any symptoms, such as sweating or headaches. Because many people feel fine, they don't think they need to get their blood pressure checked. Even if you feel normal, your health

may be at risk. Talk to your doctor about your risk for high blood pressure.

4. Many people who have high blood pressure don't know it.

About 11 million U.S. adults with high blood pressure aren't even aware they have it and are not receiving treatment to control their blood pressure.[1]Most people with uncontrolled blood pressure have health insurance and visit a health care provider at least twice a year, but the condition remains undiagnosed, hidden from the doctor and patient.[5] CDC is working with providers to find patients with high blood pressure who are "hiding in plain sight." Ask your provider what your blood pressure numbers mean and whether they are too high. Stick to your treatment plan and follow your provider's advice if you are diagnosed with high blood pressure.

5. Women and minorities face unique risks when it comes to high blood pressure.

Women with high blood pressure who become pregnant are more likely to have complications during pregnancy than those with normal blood pressure. High blood pressure can harm a mother's kidneys and other organs, and it can cause low birth weight and early delivery. Certain types of birth control can also raise a woman's risk for high blood pressure. Women with high blood pressure who want to become pregnant should work with their health care team to lower their blood pressure before becoming pregnant. African American men and women have higher rates of high blood pressure than any other race or ethnic group.[4] These individuals are also more likely to be hospitalized for high blood pressure. Experts think this is related to higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and stroke among this group. Lifestyle changes, such as reducing sodium in your diet, getting more physical activity, and reducing stress, can help lower blood pressure (see sidebar).

What CDC Is Doing

CDC supports several public health efforts that address high blood pressure, including:

- Million Hearts®. Uncontrolled high blood pressure is a leading cause of heart disease and stroke. Million Hearts® is a national initiative with a goal to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes. CDC and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services co-lead the initiative on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Million Hearts® provides toolkits for health care practitioners to help them find patients with undiagnosed high blood pressure and provide consistent, effective treatment for the condition.
- WISEWOMAN (Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for WOMen Across the Nation). The WISEWOMAN program provides low-income, under-insured, or uninsured women with chronic disease screenings, lifestyle programs, and referral services to prevent heart disease and stroke. CDC currently funds 21 WISEWOMAN programs, which operate on the local level in

states and tribal organizations.

- Sodium Reduction in Communities Program (SRCP). A diet too high in sodium is associated with higher blood pressure. SRCP aims to increase access to lower sodium food options and reduce the amount of sodium Americans eat and drink each day. CDC currently funds 6 local communities and 4 state-level programs to carry out this work.

References

1. NHANES 2013-2014 unpublished estimates. CDC/DHDSP Million Hearts Hypertension tracking.
2. Attems, J & Jellinger, KA (2014). The overlap between vascular disease and Alzheimer's disease – lessons from pathology. BMC Medicine; 12: 206.
3. Muller, M, Sigurdsson, S, Kjartansson, O, Aspelund, T, Lopez, OL, Jonnson, PV, et al. (2014). Joint effect of mid- and late-life blood pressure on the brain: The AGES-Reykjavik Study. Neurology; 82(24): 2187–2195.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). Power Down in May for National High Blood Pressure Education Month.
5. Wall, HK, Hannan, JA and Wright, JS. (2014). Patients with undiagnosed hypertension: Hiding in plain sight. JAMA; 312(19):1973-1974.

More Information

- CDC – High Blood Pressure
- American Heart Association – High Blood Pressure
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute – High Blood Pressure

Source: CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention

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