

# Hypertension

## **What is hypertension?**

Hypertension means high blood pressure. It is a major illness that affects one in every four adults. It is estimated that only 50% of individuals with hypertension know they have it. Epidemiologic studies estimate that 40% of African-American women have hypertension and it occurs in 75% of African-American women over the age of 75.

## **How serious is hypertension?**

Untreated hypertension is a serious disease. It is estimated that 70% of hypertensive patients will die of a heart attack, 15% will die of a stroke and 10% will die of kidney failure.

## **How high does my blood pressure have to be before it is called hypertension?**

Traditionally BP's over 140/90 is called hypertension. BP's over 130/80 is often called pre-hypertension. The goal of treatment is to reduce BP to less than 140/90.

## **What causes hypertension?**

In 90-95% the cause is unknown and called essential or primary hypertension. The other 5-10% is caused by chronic kidney disease or rare endocrine abnormalities and are called secondary hypertension.

## **Can I lower my risk of hypertension?**

In women there is a direct relationship between weight and blood pressure levels. Weight reduction to a BMI of 25 or less can lower the systolic blood pressure by 20 points. Dietary fats are also very important in preventing hypertension. The so called DASH diet (dietary approaches to stop hypertension) which is rich in fruits and vegetables and low in saturated fats can lower blood pressure 10-15 points. Other lifestyle changes that help are salt restriction, physical exercise, and smoking cessation and limiting consumption of alcohol and caffeine.

## **I have hypertension. It is safe to become pregnant?**

Chronic hypertension can cause adverse outcomes in pregnancy including intrauterine growth restriction, preterm labor, fetal demise and placental abruption. It is important that you achieve a normal weight and have your blood pressure under control before becoming pregnant. The most common medications used to treat hypertension are contraindicated in pregnancy. This class of medications are called ACE inhibitors and angiotension receptor blockers (ARB's). Consult with your physician prior to pregnancy.

## **Do birth control pills cause increased blood pressure?**

There may be a small increase in blood pressure with the use of oral contraceptives. The incidence is rare occurring in 41 out of 10,000 persons per year as quoted in a recent study.