WVU Medicine Uniontown Hospital Primary Care presents "Why Blood Pressure Is Important To Your Overall Health"

It is critical to maintain a healthy blood pressure. When blood pressure is too high, it can force your heart to work too hard and cause damage to your blood vessels. This month, we will discuss what constitutes a normal blood pressure range, help you understand what a blood pressure reading is and ways you can help to maintain a good blood pressure.

1. What is a normal blood pressure range?

A normal blood pressure can vary from person to person. For a lot of people, a normal range is 100-119/60-79. High blood pressure is more than 130 for the top number or more than 80 for the bottom number. We consider a patient to have hypertension if they have a high reading on at least two separate occasions.

2. What causes high blood pressure?

Many things can cause hypertension (high blood pressure.) Often hypertension is a result of being overweight, obese, or physically inactive. Eating a lot of salty food, smoking, or drinking a lot of alcohol can lead to hypertension. Some medications, such as Sudafed, over-the-counter anti-inflammatory drugs (such as ibuprofen), and steroids, can increase blood pressure. Certain medical conditions can cause hypertension. These include sleep apnea, kidney disease, thyroid disease, and other hormonal issues. Genetics also plays a role--people with a family history of hypertension are much more likely to develop hypertension themselves.

3. What is the difference between systolic and diastolic blood pressure?

A blood pressure reading is one number over top of another number. For instance, a blood pressure cuff might read 120/80. The top number is the systolic blood pressure. This is the pressure that is exerted against the walls of the blood vessels as the heart is pumping. The bottom number is the diastolic blood pressure. This is the pressure against the walls of the blood vessels while the heart is relaxing and filling up between beats.

4. What is the treatment for high blood pressure?

Treating hypertension is very important. Over time, high blood pressures can put strain on the heart and blood vessels. This can lead to further problems, such as heart attack, heart failure, stroke, and kidney failure. Fortunately, we have a lot of medication options for the treatment of blood pressure. Patients with hypertension should speak with their Primary Care Provider in order to determine the best medication for them. Lifestyle changes are also an important part of the treatment plan. Regular exercise can help tremendously. Cutting back on alcohol can also help. People who smoke should try to quit. People who are overweight should work on weight loss to improve their blood pressure.

5. Are there certain things I should eat to help maintain a good blood pressure?

Diet plays a large role in the treatment of hypertension. One aspect of this is reducing intake of sodium, or salt. Sometimes a lot of salt can be hidden in foods that people don't expect. A good rule of thumb is to limit buying things at the store that come in cans, boxes, and bags. For example, canned soups and bags of chips have a lot of sodium--even most of the ones that say "low salt" on the package. Freezer meals and restaurant

meals also have large amounts of salt in them. On the other hand, fresh fruits, vegetables, fish, and whole grains are a great option for people with high blood pressure.

6. Should I check my own blood pressure routinely?

People who have high blood pressure should get in the habit of checking their blood pressure at home. This can be helpful for people who do not yet have a diagnosis of hypertension, as it allows their Primary Care Provider to see how their blood pressure averages on a regular basis. It is also helpful for people who do have hypertension, as it can help healthcare providers determine if blood pressure is controlled, or if medications should be added or adjusted.

To schedule an appointment with a WVU Medicine Primary Care Provider in Uniontown, please call 724-430-5940.

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