



## Stewardship of the Body

“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps. 139)

### Hypertension (continued)

**How is hypertension treated?** Hypertension is generally treated with a combination of lifestyle changes and medications. If the blood pressure is just in the prehypertension range, the doctor may recommend lifestyle changes. If they are not successful in reducing the blood pressure or if the blood pressure is in the hypertension range, the doctor may prescribe medications.

**What are lifestyle changes?** Lifestyle changes merely mean adopting healthy habits in your daily life, such as:

- Follow a healthy eating plan with an emphasis on fresh fruits & vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy foods. It would limit unhealthy fats, added sugars and sodium. A diet that combines all of these elements is called the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH).
- Maintain a healthy weight. If you are overweight or obese, reducing your weight by 7 to 10 % can help lower the blood pressure and the risk of complications related to hypertension.
- Get regular physical activity. Try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week. This can include such activities as brisk walking, dancing, bike riding, gardening and housecleaning. If you have been inactive or have health issues that limit your activity, talk to your doctor about the best form of activity for you.
- Don't smoke. Stopping smoking is easier said than done, but there are a number of programs and products that can be used to assist you in this difficult endeavor. Your doctor may be able to help you choose the one that would work best for you. If you do not smoke, try to limit your exposure to second-hand smoke.
- Limit alcohol. Drinking should be done only in moderation. This means for women, no more than one drink a day and for men, no more than two drinks a day. A drink is a 12 ounce beer, a 5 ounce glass of wine, 1.5 ounces of 80-proof liquor or 1 ounce of 100-proof liquor.
- Manage stress. Getting regular physical activity and a good night's sleep can help relieve daily pressures. Studies have found that activities such as yoga, tai chi and meditation also can be beneficial.

**What medications are used to control blood pressure?** There are a number of different blood pressure medications that work in different ways. Some remove excess fluid and salt from the body while others slow the heartbeat or relax and widen the blood vessels to lower the blood pressure. Sometimes, one medication will be effective, while in other cases two different medications may be necessary to control the blood pressure. You and your doctor need to work together to find the right medication or combination of medications for you. Some of the types of medications used to control blood pressure include:

- Diuretics (water pills): these help the kidneys rid the body of water and salt and cause the blood vessels to relax (widen). This reduces overall body fluid and blood pressure.

- Beta blockers: these cause the heart to beat slower and with less force.. Some also cause the blood vessels to relax.
- Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors: these prevent the body from making a hormone that narrows blood vessels and releasing a hormone that retains sodium and water in the body. This allows the blood vessels to relax and maintain better blood flow.
- Angiotensin II receptor blockers: these work like ACE inhibitors by blocking the hormone that narrows blood vessels.
- Calcium channel blockers: these keep calcium from entering cells in the heart and blood vessels, allowing blood vessels to relax.
- Renin inhibitors: these slow down the production of an enzyme from the kidney that increases the blood pressure.
- Alpha blockers: these reduce the effect of nerve impulses that narrow blood vessels, so that the blood vessels can relax and widen.
- Alpha-beta blockers: these combine the effects of alpha blockers and beta blockers. They slow the heart and cause the blood vessels to relax and widen.
- Central nervous system inhibitors: these reduce nerve impulses that increase heart rate and cause blood vessels to narrow, so the heart rate slows down and the blood vessels widen to lower the blood pressure.
- Direct vasodilators: these act directly on blood vessels to make them relax.

**What about side effects?** Like all medications, blood pressure medications can have side effects. If you notice side effects, talk to your doctor. The dose may be able to be adjusted or the medication changed to relieve the side effects. **DO NOT STOP TAKING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE MEDICATION ON YOUR OWN.** This could result in a sudden and severe rebound increase in blood pressure that can have serious consequences such as heart attack or stroke. Also, do not increase or decrease your medication without first talking to your doctor.

**How long does it take to treat hypertension?** Once you develop prehypertension or hypertension, you are facing a life-long commitment to control your blood pressure. It can be done if you:

- Make the lifestyle changes recommended.
- Take your medications exactly as prescribed.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about your medication and read the information that you receive.
- Ask for help if you cannot afford your medication. There are ways to obtain medications at reduced cost or free. Also your doctor may be able to prescribe a similar medication that costs less.
- Keep your medical appointments.
- Get regular checkups.
- Get your blood pressure taken regularly.
- Consider getting your own blood pressure monitor to check it often at home.

Keeping your body as healthy as possible is a way of thanking God for the precious gift of life.