

## Aggressive Management of Hypertension

More than 60% of older persons in the United States suffer from hypertension, commonly known as high blood pressure. Hypertension is defined as an increase in blood pressure above normal.

Blood pressure is measured as systolic pressure over diastolic pressure. Systolic pressure occurs when blood is pumped into the arteries as the heart contracts. Diastolic pressure occurs when the heart rests between contractions.

Although the ideal blood pressure is 109/67, anything below 140/90 is considered normal. If your blood pressure is higher than 160/90, you need medical help. These figures refer to consistent measures over a given time period as blood pressure does fluctuate depending on conditions such as stress.

There are two types of hypertension. The first is called Isolated Systolic Hypertension or ISH. This is a systolic pressure greater than 160 over a diastolic pressure of 90. This type of hypertension increases with age and almost 25% of all older Americans have this problem.

ISH is a known risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Previously, ISH was looked upon as a symptom of natural aging. Today we know that this is no longer true.

The second type of hypertension reflects increases in both the systolic and diastolic measurements. Both types of hypertension are risk factors for heart disease and heart failure.

However, both types of hypertension are treatable. They are not an inevitable companion of old age as was once believed. Many studies have been conducted to substantiate this fact. One major study, Systolic Hypertension in the Elderly Program, reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association, demonstrated that ISH is easily treated with inexpensive medications that have very few side effects and significantly decrease the risks of heart attack and stroke.

Both types of hypertension are not only treatable but they are also preventable without medication. In some cases this may require a major change in lifestyle but the rewards are well worth it.

Aerobic exercise is recommended to reduce blood pressure. Even as little as twenty minutes a day is beneficial. You don't have to do push-ups, knee bends or the kinds of exercises your physical education teacher required of you in school. You can benefit just as well from any fun aerobic activity such as walking, cycling, running or swimming.

Proper nutrition is also necessary. One should curb salt intake and follow a low fat diet. Consume high fiber foods such as whole grains, and the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables. Limit high fat choices such as ice cream and opt for lean meats.

Diabetics, especially, need to exert extra effort to control their hypertension. The risk for heart attack is higher for diabetics than for those who are not diabetic.

The most important strategy that people can use to prevent or to reduce hypertension is to resign from the couch potato club. Many studies have proven that regular physical exercise not only prevents hypertension but also reduces hypertension in people who already have it.

Contrary to popular thinking in years past, hypertension is not a necessary by-product of aging. With aggressive management, hypertension is treatable and avoidable. While many medications are available, hypertension can often be successfully managed by a combination of exercise and proper diet.

## About the Author

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