



HYPERTENSION

the silent killer

By: James G. Scelfo, MD, FAFP

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is known as “The Silent Killer” because it can be completely asymptomatic while causing a vast amount of vascular and organ damage. It is a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and vision disturbances.

There are an estimated 50 million American adults with hypertension, of which approximately one third are undiagnosed. Even more staggering is that this number doubles when pre-hypertension data is added. This condition is so prevalent that 90% of Americans who do not have hypertension at age 55 will eventually develop the disease.

Routine screening for hypertension is currently recommended annually for anyone 18 years of age or older. Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 and hypertension is defined as blood pressure greater than or equal to 140/90 with the range in between being known as pre-hypertension. These definitions are important because it helps to determine your risk of future disease development. The risk of cardiovascular disease doubles for each increment of

20/10mm Hg beginning at 115/75. This, along with other risk factors (family history, lifestyle, race, obesity, cholesterol), helps your physician determine how aggressive to be with management. Currently only 27% of Americans with diagnosed hypertension are being treated adequately.

QUICK FACTS

- Everyone over 18 years old should schedule annual routine screenings
- Blood pressure 140/90 or above is hypertension status
- Inform your doctor of any family history of hypertension
- Lifestyle changes such as healthy eating habits, regular exercise, quitting smoking and drinking alcohol in moderation can help reduce your risk of hypertension

Optimal blood pressure management may range from therapeutic lifestyle modifications to medications or may involve further investigation. Hypertension is so dangerous because it can cause progressive damage over many years when left undiagnosed and unmanaged, without causing any symptoms.

Blood pressure control is only part of the management of vascular (blood vessel) health. Other preventable risk factors such as cholesterol and blood sugar need to be taken into account as well. Many will need medication to control these risk factors but all can benefit from a healthy lifestyle which includes a good diet, regular exercise, weight control, tobacco cessation and drinking alcohol in moderation. The salient point is that this disease and the damage it causes can be prevented or successfully managed with routine monitoring, patient education and a close patient-physician relationship.

*Courtesy of Personalized Primary Care
950 Celebration Boulevard; Suite D
Celebration, FL 34747
(407) 566-2454 T*