

WORLD HYPERTENSION DAY

Measure your blood pressure at home

STAR HEALTH DESK

Hypertension has emerged as global epidemic that affects over 1.5 billion people worldwide. It is a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke, kidney and eye diseases. Hypertension may kill you silently as it does not typically cause symptoms. Many hypertensive people are not aware of it and do not take proper action to prevent the impending dangers created by it.

In order to encourage patients and people at risk to measure their blood pressure regularly at home and curb the hypertension related disorders, World Hypertension Day is being observed today throughout the world. The day strives to create awareness worldwide to highlight the risks associated with hypertension and to communicate information on prevention, detection, treatment and control.

The theme for this year is "Measure your blood pressure at home". The theme emphasises the importance of being aware of one's blood pressure and taking responsibility of one's own health. Measuring blood pressure at home helps individuals and the caregivers understand how blood pressure could be controlled on a day-to-day basis through lifestyle changes and appropriate therapies and medication.

A blood pressure reading is expressed as two numbers and measured in millimeters of Mercury (mm Hg). The top number is systolic pressure — it is the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats. The bottom number is diastolic pressure — the pressure in arteries when the heart is resting between beats.

Normal blood pressure is systolic below 120 and diastolic below 80. Hypertension is systolic blood pressure at or above 140 mm Hg and/or diastolic blood pressure at 90 mm Hg or higher.

"Prehypertension" is systolic

pressure of 120-139 mm Hg, and/or diastolic pressure of 80-89 mm Hg. This is the point at which lifestyle changes are recommended to reduce blood pressure.

Some studies suggest that a small decrease in the blood pressure significantly lowers the risk of developing diseases. One meta-analysis on 1 million patients suggests that a 3-4 mm Hg systolic increase in blood pressure would translate into a 20 percent higher stroke death rate and a 12 percent higher death rate from ischemic heart disease.

In patients with additional risk factors, including obesity, diabetes and hyperlipidemia, the impact of these small changes in blood pressure on cerebrovascular disease (CVD) is even greater.

There is often no single cause of high blood pressure. A number of factors can combine to raise blood pressure. High blood pressure tends to run in families. Being overweight, having a high consumption of alcohol, poor level of exercise, high stress level and eating too much sodium (found in salt) may lead to an increase in blood pressure. Blood pressure also increases with age.

There is no cure for high blood pressure, but it is controllable usually with lifestyle modifications and medication if indicated. A big reason for the gap between knowledge and action for blood pressure control is — it remains asymptomatic in many cases; that is why it is called the silent killer and there is a long lag period from the beginning of the problem to the time when patients are aware of the damage it caused.

"High blood pressure can be easily detected and usually it is controllable. World Hypertension Day is an opportunity to remind us and to pay more attention to this risk factor," said Dr M H Millat, Consulted Cardiac Surgeon of Square Hospitals Ltd. "We have affordable and easy



ways to treat high blood pressure. If that knowledge was applied more often, we could prevent much more death and disabilities", he added.

The main message for the public, Dr Millat said, is to have your blood pressure checked routinely and to live a healthy lifestyle to prevent hypertension. If you are over 30 years you should check your blood pressure once every year and if you have a positive family history of hypertension or have other risk factors you should check more frequently.

Key messages are keeping weight in a good range, being physically active, eating a diet high in fruits, vegetables and low in saturated fat, sodium, avoiding tobacco and excess alcohol drinking. If you already have high blood pressure, pay attention to keep it controlled under a physician's care.

So, be aware, get your blood pressure checked regularly. Knowing your numbers is the first step to prevent hypertension, subsequently to prevent heart disease, stroke, kidney and eye diseases.

5 ways to control high blood pressure

DR RIFFAT H LUCY

Controlling high blood pressure requires combination of various approaches. It includes effective monitoring, appropriate treatment and most importantly, some changes to lifestyle choices. Following five changes will have an enormous impact both on controlling high pressure as well as your long-term health.

1. Quits smoking

Smoking has enormous bad impacts on our health. Besides causing cancer and other diseases, smoking directly affects your blood pressure profile. Many of the chemicals in cigarette smoke damage the walls of arterioles, causing a decrease in the ability of these small blood vessels to relax and increase blood pressure.

2. Control your weight

In addition to making existing high blood pressure worse, being overweight can contribute to the development of diabetes, which causes kidney damage and further worsening of high blood pressure. Studies have shown that even a 5 percent reduction in body weight is effective for decreasing blood pressure.

3. Control salt intake

Salt is a fiercely debated topic among high blood pressure researchers. While this debate is ongoing, there are two pieces of information we should know —

(a) Salt can make high blood pressure worse; and
(b) Too much salt can damage our heart.

For these reasons, controlling your salt intake is an important step in managing your high blood pressure.

4. Decrease bad fats

"Bad fats" (unsaturated fats and trans fats) have a negative effect on both your heart and your blood vessels. Too much of them can damage these important organs and lead to problems like heart attack. Decreasing intake of these fats will also aid in weight loss strategies.

5. Exercise more

Exercise strengthens your heart, improves circulation and helps keep off extra pounds. Because even modest levels of weight loss offer great benefit in reducing high blood pressure, and because your heart responds well to small amounts of extra work, even a little exercise can go a long way.

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Digital wrist watch or arm cuff blood pressure monitor are the convenient tools for measuring blood pressure at home. It is employed to measure systolic and diastolic blood pressure as well as heart rate. Ease-of-use has made these blood pressure monitors the fastest growing segment in health market. There's no need to take technical support from a healthcare provider and people can take record easily.



HAVE A NICE DAY

The sweet solution - 1

DR RUBAIUL MURSHED

Which is the mother of all medicines? Yes, 'honey'. It takes 300 bees flying 15,000 air miles to make about 1/2 kg of honey, which will contain the pollen of two million flowers. It is available in most of the countries and not that costly. Finally it is gaining scientific recognition and international attention as a wonderful food and medicine. Recently, the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration has also approved honey as a medicine. However, it has been used as a medicinally in India, Egypt and the Middle East for thousands of years.

Honey is truly a head-to-toe cure remedy. Modern medicine is slowly learning this fact. It is an effective treatment for depressed immune system. It can increase hemoglobin count and treat anemia caused by nutritional factors.

Honey is a unique source of energy that provides 64 calories per tablespoon. Moving down the esophagus and through the digestive tract, honey can help distressed stomachs. It has been proven to regulate digestive tract function. It reduces the weight and good for obese people. It contains at least 31 nutrients, 13 minerals, the component part of nine vitamins, 20 of the 22 known amino acids and four key enzymes. Constant use of honey strengthens the white blood corpuscles to fight bacteria and viral diseases.

It has been published that pure honey taken with food daily relieves complaints of high cholesterol. Honey increases calcium absorption. It stimulates the formation of cells and tissue, acts as an anti-rheumatic and relieves inflammation. It is helpful in treating Arthritis. It also contains a variety of antioxidants, which may reduce the risk of cardiovas-

cular disease and cancer.

In a fascinating modern development, scientists and doctors are beginning to rediscover the effectiveness of honey applied topically to wound and burn treatment. Raw honey contains natural antibiotics, which can kill bacteria.

It has been compared with silver sulfadiazine, the standard treatment for superficial burns. As an antiseptic, honey is also a drawing agent for poisons from bites or stings or infected wounds.

Honey is also exceptionally effective for colds and all kinds of respiratory illnesses. One study of more than fifteen hundred patients found that it improved chronic bronchitis, allergic rhinitis and sinusitis. Many have found two teaspoons of raw honey, last thing at night can help with 'sleeplessness'.

But certain precautions should be taken. Children below one year should never be given honey due to the risk of infant botulism. Also, if you have any known allergies to specific plants, then make sure that the honey you are using is not made from that plant. People with allergies to bee stings should be careful when using other bee-related products.

Honey and black seed is a good combination. Some studies revealed that the combination of honey and cinnamon or garlic (organic) and apple cider vinegar (unpasteurised) is a wonder drug. Today, some people may turn to honey when nothing else works.

But there are good reasons for using honey as a curative of first choice. Let honey be a beneficial addition to any cup of tea or drinking water or milk and don't hesitate to make such a sweet solution to your life.

(To be continued)

The writer is a Healthcare Management Specialist and Visiting Professor of North South University (NSU), Dhaka, Bangladesh.



Human touch helps stroke survivors regain mobility

Six months after a stroke, survivors who are able to walk but still have moderate-to-severe difficulty in doing so, make better progress in their walking ability through physical therapist-assisted training than training provided by a robotic device, according to report published in the medical journal Stroke.

"We wanted to know whether using a robotic device that guides the limb in a symmetrical walking pattern would facilitate greater improvements in walking speed and symmetry than more traditional walking interventions with a physical therapist," lead author Dr. T. George Hornby said in an American Heart Association news release. Hornby and colleagues at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago evaluated 48 stroke patients who had been partially paralysed on one side of the body for more than 6 months. All of the patients participated in 12 sessions of 30-minute therapy on a treadmill while wearing a harness to support their body weight.

Half of the patients were randomly assigned to robotic-assisted training, which provided continuous symmetrical stepping assistance, while the other half was trained by a physical therapist, who assisted the

patients only as needed to ensure continuous walking.

The increase in walking speed at the end of treatment was two times higher in the group that worked with the physical therapist than in the group that worked with the robot, the team reports. In addition, the time that patients were able to stand on one leg — a measure of progress — improved significantly only in the group treated by the physical therapist.

Patient reports of improved physical functioning were received only by those with severe deficits in mobility who received therapist-assisted training.

Changes were maintained for up to 6 months, the investigators report. These study results suggest that stroke patients with chronic partial paralysis, but who are able to walk independently, even at very slow speed, make better progress working with a physical therapist rather than a robotic device to improve their walking skills," Hornby and his colleagues conclude.

On the other hand, they suggest that physical therapy with a robotic device might be more effective for stroke survivors who can't walk.

Source: Stroke, June 2008

Treatment decision: Migraine

STAR HEALTH DESK

Living with migraine is a daily challenge. When it comes to migraine treatment, there are no guarantees. But you can work with your doctor to develop a treatment plan that meets your needs. Consider the basic pros and cons of acute and preventive treatment.

Acute medication: Take medication on an as-needed basis. The problem that can arise in individuals with migraine headaches is something doctors refer to as "medication overuse headaches" or "rebound headaches." Essentially, in this situation, a person's migraine headaches,

for whatever reason, increase in frequency and lead to using medications more than a couple of days per week. That can result in withdrawal headaches caused by physical dependence on that medicine. If overused, may lead to rebound headaches and it is difficult to treat until the individual completely stops taking that particular medication. Another important thing should be considered that it is costly for those on limited incomes or without insurance coverage for medications.

Preventive medication: Prevent or control migraines before they start. Patients should take medication daily whether they

have pain or not.

Typically physician consider preventive treatment if the person has more than a few days of migraine headache per month. For some people who have severe attacks and are quite disabled, even if they occur just a few days a month, preventive therapy may be needed for them because the acute treatments are not working very well and those individuals are frequently missing work or other activities. Patients do not like using acute medications more than about two days per week or more than nine days per month. So consult regarding the matter. Also ask yourself these questions:

- What treatments have been most effective for you in the past?
- Can you recognise early warning signs of an impending migraine?
- Are you comfortable taking medication every day?
- Are you concerned about possible side effects or medication overuse?

Even if you choose preventive treatment, you may still have migraines occasionally. Make sure you have acute medications on hand to treat them. Also consider how your lifestyle may be affecting your migraines. Making healthy choices about diet, exercise and stress can go a long way towards promoting good health.

Breastfeeding halves rheumatoid arthritis risk

Women who breastfeed their babies longer are less likely to get rheumatoid arthritis, Swedish researchers said.

Mothers who breastfed for 13 months or more were half as likely to get the painful joint condition as women who never breastfed, said Mitra Pikwer and colleagues at the Malmö University Hospital in Sweden, who led the study.

"Although it is difficult to separate the effect of breast feeding from that of childbirth, our data suggest that rheumatoid arthritis is inversely associated with long-term breastfeeding, rather than with the number of children born," they said.

The researchers said they wanted to see if a larger, community-based study would echo earlier studies on the links between breastfeeding or the use of oral contraceptives and the condition affecting about 20



million people worldwide.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease caused when the body confuses healthy tissues for foreign substances and attacks itself.

Some drugs to treat the condition seek to reduce inflammation

directly while others tone down the immune system's response, which can leave some patients vulnerable to infections and cancer.

The Swedish team compared 136 women with rheumatoid arthritis and 544 women of simi-

lar age without the disease. They also found that breastfeeding for between up to 12 months made women 25 percent less likely to get the joint condition.

The findings bolster previous research linking breastfeeding to a reduced risk of the disease. But, as with other studies, the Swedish teams said they did not know the exact reason why.

Breastfeeding is known to provide multiple benefits for the baby and studies have shown the practice may also protect mothers from breast and ovarian cancers.

The study published in the British Medical Journal's Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases also suggested that oral contraceptives — thought to offer protection because they contain certain hormones — did not seem to make a difference.

Source: Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases

Popular launched Azithromycin injection

Popular Pharmaceuticals Ltd. has launched Azithromycin in injection formulation in the local market recently. The antibiotic is used to treat certain respiratory infections (e.g. pneumonia) or pelvic infections (e.g., pelvic inflammatory disease). The company manufactured this injectable formula, first ever in the country entitled Zibac.

Free health screening at JBFH

With a view to mark the World Hypertension Day, Japan Bangladesh Friendship Hospital (JBFH) in collaboration with Sandoz will organise a free health screening programme today at their hospital premises. People over 40 years will be screened for high blood pressure and its associated adverse effects on other systems of the body. They will also arrange a training programme to educate people how to measure blood pressure at home. The programme will continue from 8.30 am to 1.30 pm.