



Clinical Champion Update

Date: 11/4/19

Subject: Hypertension

Lifestyle Modification Strategies for Hypertension

“But I don’t *want* to take a pill for my blood pressure! Besides, I feel perfectly fine.”

Most patients would really prefer fewer pills, of course. Lifestyle modification is always a good start when discussing prehypertension or hypertension, although it does require some (sustained) effort on the part of patients. Their buy-in will pay off, however.

Diet: Emphasize fruits and vegetables, minimize oils and saturated fat, limit sodium and processed foods. Examples: DASH diet, whole food plant-based diet.

Why?

- Saturated fat from meat increases blood viscosity, which contributes to higher BP
- Fats and oils of all types (saturated, partially hydrogenated, polyunsaturated, monounsaturated) damage arterial endothelium, leading to plaque formation
- The higher potassium content of a more plant-based diet helps to reduce BP by countering the effects of sodium and relaxing artery walls
- Nitrate-rich vegetables (e.g., arugula, cilantro, rhubarb, butter-leaf lettuce, and other leafy greens) provide antioxidant flavonoids that upregulate

endothelial nitric oxide production, increasing arterial relaxation and blood flow

- Restricting sodium and processed foods (which are typically high in fat and sugar as well as sodium and low in fiber) and increasing consumption of whole grains all help to lower BP by improving arterial blood flow and elasticity
- Drinking hibiscus tea (or black or green tea) lowers both systolic and diastolic BP
- Including ground flaxseed also lowers BP better than ACE-I

Physical activity: Studies have shown that inactivity is a significant risk factor (5-13%) for hypertension.

- Aim for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week; more is better than less
- Vigorous exercise is good, but even walking decreases risk
- However, you can't outrun an unhealthy diet

Control weight:

- BMI 25-29.9 nearly doubles hypertension risk
- BMI 30 and up more than doubles the risk

Alcohol: Risk increases with amount consumed

- Limit to 1 drink per day for women and for men older than 65
- Limit to 2 drinks per day for men 65 and younger
- Remember: According to the World Health Organization, there's no safe minimum....

Stop smoking, or don't start.

- Smoking raises BP in the short term

- Chemicals in tobacco damage the endothelium, eventually leading to narrowed arteries
- Exposure to secondhand smoke can also raise BP

Stress management

- Incorporate relaxation techniques
- Strengthen your social network
- Manage your time

Thanks,

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Hypertension Clinical Champions

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... and, for your viewing pleasure:

"Forks Over Knives" documentary, 2011 / "What the Health" documentary, 2017 / "The Game Changers" documentary, 2018