

## QUESTIONS ABOUT HYPERTENSION

- This pamphlet has been designed by the health care professionals of Marquette General Hospital to provide you with information about hypertension.
- Hypertension is another name for high blood pressure, the most common chronic disease in American adults. Often there are no symptoms; therefore, it is very important to obtain early diagnosis and treatment.
- People with a family history of hypertension are at higher risk for developing it. Also, as we age we can develop hypertension even if we have had normal blood pressure previously.
- High blood pressure cannot be cured but it can be controlled by working with your doctor.

### HOW IS HYPERTENSION DIAGNOSED?

- Hypertension is diagnosed by taking your blood pressure, which measures the amount of force your blood exerts against artery walls. Consistent blood pressure readings above 135/85 means you have hypertension.
- Although everyone has a slightly different normal blood pressure, the generally accepted high normal is 135/85.
- The two numbers have different meanings. The top number is called systolic blood pressure and indicates the amount of pressure exerted on blood vessel walls with each heart beat. The bottom number is the diastolic reading which signifies the amount of pressure when the heart is at rest.
- Your blood pressure changes throughout the day, “serial readings” (a number of readings over 2-4 weeks at different times) are necessary before a diagnosis of hypertension is made.

### WHY IS HYPERTENSION A PROBLEM?

- If left untreated, hypertension can increase the risk of kidney disease, cause strokes, heart disease, and injury to blood vessels.
- Hypertension usually has no symptoms; therefore, detecting the problem is difficult. For that reason, your blood pressure should be checked as your doctor recommends.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

- Attention to lifestyle, dietary changes, and use of medication are three ways you can control hypertension.

### WHAT ARE SOME CHANGES THAT YOU CAN MAKE AT HOME?

- If you are under constant stress, tension, or worry, find someone to talk to about your problems. Also learn about stress reduction techniques.
- Get appropriate rest and sleep.
- Talk to your doctor about starting an exercise program. Exercise helps to control blood pressure and reduces stress.
- Find activities/interests which make you feel happy and relaxed. Do them regularly.
- Control your weight, avoid smoking, excessive alcohol and caffeine.

### WHY IS DIET IMPORTANT?

- Too much salt (sodium chloride) in the diet can cause the body to hold water which raises the blood pressure.
- If your doctor says you need a special diet, a dietitian will help you redesign your diet to reduce salt content or help you lose weight.

### HOW CAN YOU LOWER THE SALT CONTENT OF YOUR DIET?

- Stop salting food when you prepare it.

- Don't salt food at the table. Other seasonings can be used to bring out the natural flavors of foods, including herbs, garlic, onion and fruit flavoring.
- Avoid foods that you know are high in salt/sodium. This includes snack items such as cold cuts, potato chips, pickles, and many fast foods.
- Many foods contain large amounts of sodium but do not taste salty. You need to recognize the salt content of foods you purchase. The key word on food labels is sodium.

#### WHEN IS MEDICATION NECESSARY?

- Your doctor may order medication to control your blood pressure if making other changes does not lower it sufficiently.
- The medication prescribed for you may be different from that of someone else who is taking blood pressure medicine.

#### TO GET THE BEST RESULTS FROM YOUR MEDICINE:

- Take all of the doses at the proper times. Find a way that is easy to remember. For example, take a pill with breakfast or mark your calendar after you take a pill once a day.
- If medications are prescribed take them just as ordered and DO NOT stop taking medications because you feel well.
- Know the side effects of your medicines and the dosage you take. If you can't remember them, make a list to carry with you.
- Read the labels carefully on all over-the-counter medications. DO NOT choose any that have a warning for people with high blood pressure.
- Talk to your pharmacist, doctor, or nurse regarding your medicines.

For more information on hypertension contact your local American Heart Association

Additional health information is available through the MGH Health Information Center (906)225-4950 or 1-800-562-9753 ext. 4950.



