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February is
American

heart

Month

High Blood Pressure

What is blood pressure?
Blood pressure is the force of circulating blood against the walls of the blood vessels. It is affected by:
• The force of the heart pump
• The amount of blood in the vessels
• The elasticity of the blood vessels

Importance of pressure
Blood pressure is essential for the body to function. It provides the force needed to move blood through the vessels to the organs and tissues. Without it, the body would not be able to deliver oxygen and nutrients to the cells, and waste products would not be removed.

What is high blood pressure?
High blood pressure is a condition in which the force of the blood against the artery walls is consistently too high. It is often called the "silent killer" because it usually has no symptoms. It is a leading cause of heart disease and stroke.

What causes high blood pressure?
High blood pressure is caused by a variety of factors, including:
• Age (blood pressure tends to rise with age)
• Obesity
• Family history
• Diet (high sodium intake)
• Stress
• Lack of exercise
• Smoking
• Alcohol consumption

Risk Factors
• Family history of high blood pressure
• Race (African Americans have the highest risk)
• Age (risk increases with age)
• Obesity
• Sedentary lifestyle
• Diabetes mellitus

Measuring blood pressure
Blood pressure is measured by a health care professional using a sphygmomanometer. The device consists of an inflatable cuff that is wrapped around the upper arm. The cuff is inflated to a pressure higher than the person's blood pressure, which temporarily stops the flow of blood through the arteries. As the cuff is slowly deflated, the first sound heard is the systolic blood pressure, and the last sound heard is the diastolic blood pressure.

Effects of high blood pressure
High blood pressure can damage the arteries and lead to various complications, including:
• **Damage to blood vessels:** High blood pressure can cause the arteries to become narrowed and stiff, which can lead to atherosclerosis and heart disease.
• **Damage to the eyes:** High blood pressure can damage the blood vessels in the eyes, leading to vision problems and blindness.
• **Damage to the brain:** High blood pressure can increase the risk of stroke and other brain-related complications.
• **Damage to the heart:** High blood pressure can lead to heart failure and other heart-related complications.
• **Damage to the kidneys:** High blood pressure can damage the kidneys, leading to kidney disease and failure.

Treatment of high blood pressure
High blood pressure is usually treated with medication. The goal is to lower the blood pressure to a level that reduces the risk of complications. Lifestyle changes, such as eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and maintaining a healthy weight, can also help to lower blood pressure.

Taking control of your blood pressure
• Monitor your blood pressure regularly.
• Eat a healthy diet (low sodium, high potassium).
• Exercise regularly.
• Maintain a healthy weight.
• Limit alcohol consumption.
• Stop smoking.
• Manage stress.

Salt and blood pressure
High sodium intake is a major risk factor for high blood pressure. Reducing sodium intake can help to lower blood pressure. The American Heart Association recommends limiting sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams per day, and ideally to less than 1,500 milligrams per day.

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80