



Center for Human Nutrition

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Medical Ammunition Available to Fight Hypertension



High blood pressure, or hypertension, is inevitable if you live long enough. Recognizing hypertension and taking appropriate steps to combat it, however, are what really count. We can't prevent high blood pressure, but we can delay it with diet and exercise, said Dr. Ron Victor, chief of hypertension and professor of internal medicine at UT Southwestern. Once you have hypertension, it requires medication, as well as diet and exercise, to get blood pressure back down to where it needs to be.

Offering practical medical advice at a Friends of the Center for Human Nutrition luncheon, Dr. Victor cited case histories of three U.S. presidents— Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Bill Clinton who suffered from hypertension. Franklin Roosevelt had terrible hypertension, which frustrated his personal physician because effective medication was not available back then to treat the president, Dr. Victor said. His doctor knew he was at risk of having a stroke, which he did in 1946 during his fourth term. Since then, one of the biggest medical success stories has been the development of more than 70 different drugs for hypertension, Dr. Victor said. In addition, doctors have studied and learned much more about the importance of proper diet and physical activity in helping control hypertension.

Dr. Victor provided the following suggestions for lowering blood pressure:

- * Monitor salt intake not only what you get from the shaker, but from processed foods typically high in sodium.
- * Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. A new diet plan called **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)** offers a meal plan low in total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol, and rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products.
- * Consume alcohol in moderation if at all.
- * Pay close attention to cholesterol levels, as many people with hypertension also have higher-than-normal cholesterol levels.

Hypertension (continued from Page 1)

Dr. Victor also discussed various classes of blood pressure medications:

Diuretics — The oldest type of blood pressure drug, diuretics help rid the body of excess fluids and salt. They have few side effects if taken in low doses, yet take about a month before producing results.

ACE inhibitors — Developed in the mid-1980s, ACE inhibitors block the effects of angiotensin-converting enzymes in blood. They are quite effective and may provide additional protection for the heart and kidneys, yet cause a dry cough in about 3 percent to 10 percent of patients.

ARBs — A new type of drug, angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARBs) act similar to ACE inhibitors, but do not cause a cough. They have fewer side effects than any other class of hypertension medication and also protect the heart and kidneys, particularly in patients with high blood pressure and diabetes.

Calcium channel blockers — Effective medications that received unwarranted negative publicity in the past, linking it to heart attacks. Swelling ankles is often a side effect from these drugs.

Beta-blockers — Another older medication, beta-blockers are prescribed for patients who already have heart disease, as they protect against further injury to the heart. However, side effects are often numerous.

Sometimes, doctors combine medications to get fewer side effects, Dr. Victor said. Most side effects come with higher dosages. If you have to take two or three drugs, it doesn't mean you have a really bad case; it's just that your doctor is trying to lower the possibility of side effects.

Does our blood pressure change with age?

If a woman is 65 and has had normal blood pressure up until then, there's about a 90 percent chance she will develop hypertension during the next 20 years, Dr. Victor said. The percentage is about the same for men. That doesn't mean our blood pressure rises as we get older. When treating patients ages 55 and older, doctors place more emphasis on the systolic (higher) number than the diastolic (lower) blood pressure reading, he said. It's more important to get the higher number in check. A normal, or good, level would be less than 135 for systolic and less than 85 for diastolic. ■

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Food for the Holidays: Hot Chocolate



This week on **Healthwatch***, we've been talking about ways you can eat better this holiday season while still enjoying the holidays. On a cold night, there's nothing like sitting by the fire and enjoying your holiday decorations while sipping a mug of hot chocolate. Believe it or not, that could actually be good for you. Lona Sandon, a registered dietitian at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, says drinking a cup of dark hot chocolate can have many of the same heart-health benefits as drinking a glass of red wine. Chocolate in its pure form can help lower cholesterol and prevent heart disease. The problem is the things we add to chocolate to make candy, such as sugar, butter and milk. Dark chocolate has more antioxidants and less sugar added to it, so it's the best way to enjoy chocolate. Making hot chocolate using skim milk and dark chocolate creates a healthier fireside treat. ■

Food for the Holidays: Nuts

We're talking about maintaining a healthful diet this week on **Healthwatch***. At this time of year, we seem to spend a lot of time discussing what we shouldn't eat - and most of that is the food that we want to eat. Today we'll talk about a popular holiday food that's healthful. If you see nuts offered as a snack at a party or used as an ingredient in holiday dishes, those might be treats that offer health benefits. Nuts generally contain "good" fats. Walnuts contain a polyunsaturated fat that works much like the fat in heart-healthy fish oil, while pecans, peanuts and almonds contain monounsaturated fats that can help lower cholesterol. But Dr. Jo Ann Carson, a nutrition expert at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, says nuts are also high in calories, so if you add them to your diet, you should be replacing other foods. Eat nuts instead of candy or other snacks. ■



Food for the Holidays: Holiday Weight Gain



We may have made it through Thanksgiving, but those watching their weight have an even bigger challenge ahead: the holiday party season. This week on **Healthwatch***, we'll talk about some ways to maintain a healthier diet in spite of holiday temptations. It doesn't take much for an individual to add up to a larger number on the scale in January. Dr. Jo Ann Carson, a nutrition expert at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, says just 500 extra calories a day between Thanksgiving and New Year's can result in a 7-pound weight gain. You may not eat 500 extra calories every day, but there may be days when you eat a lot more than that. But that doesn't mean you have to give up treats entirely. It just means you may have to choose between treats. ■

Food for the Holidays: Treat Tradeoffs



This week on **Healthwatch***, we're talking about how to maintain a healthful diet while still enjoying the holidays. Previously, we found that a few extra calories a day can add up to a few extra pounds. One strategy that Dr. Jo Ann Carson, a nutrition expert at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, recommends is making tradeoffs. Instead of eating every treat, choose the one you like the best or choose smaller portions of each. You can also make substitutions - using egg whites instead of eggs, skim milk instead of whole milk and sugar substitutes instead of sugar - in as many places as possible, including the "normal" food you eat during the holidays. Keep an eye on serving sizes, as well. Restaurants and relatives like to load up plates, so don't eat everything you're served. At a buffet, serve yourself smaller portions. ■

Food for the Holidays: Cranberries



This week on **Healthwatch***, we're talking about holiday food. We've been talking about holiday foods and weight gain, but there are some popular holiday foods that can be beneficial. For instance, cranberry juice, which is often used as a base for holiday punch, may help prevent urinary tract infections. Researchers at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas say that doesn't mean you should drink gallons of it, though. Their studies have shown that large quantities of cranberry juice - a liter a day - could raise the risk for urinary stones. Dr. Margaret Pearle, a UT Southwestern urologist, says this doesn't mean you should stop drinking cranberry juice, just that you shouldn't drink such large amounts on a daily basis. You can also get benefits from drinking orange juice and lemonade. ■

Ward Off Type 2 Diabetes By Increasing Physical Activity

Making a commitment to increase physical activity now decreases the chances of developing type 2 diabetes later, says Dr. Abhimanyu Garg, professor of internal medicine at UT Southwestern Medical Center. "Avoiding sedentary behaviors and increasing physical activity, particularly for individuals with a family history of diabetes, lowers the chances of someone developing type 2 diabetes later in life," Dr. Garg says. "Parents who have diabetes should make sure their children are not overweight or obese and should encourage physical activity." Type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease, affects 16 million Americans. The cause of diabetes is unknown, although both genetics and environmental factors such as obesity and lack of exercise appear to play a role in its onset. ■



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