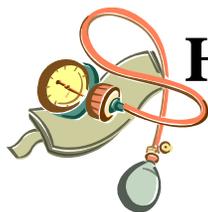


Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

May 2008 Newsletter



High Blood Pressure Education Month

By Mindy Bell, BS

Have you ever been told by your doctor or other health professional that your blood pressure is high? Chances are that you or someone you know has, because over half of older Georgians have high blood pressure (HBP).

We know that it is important to have regular blood pressure check-ups, but why should we be concerned about our blood pressure numbers? Do you know what impact HBP can have on long-term health? What can you do to help prevent and control HBP? These are good questions that you can find out more about in this month's spotlight on HBP education.

The heart and blood vessels make up your cardiovascular system. The heart has the important job of pumping blood through the blood vessels to carry oxygen and nutrients needed by the body. The force of blood against the vessel walls is called blood pressure.

Sometimes blood pressure can rise too high and remain high over time. This condition is called high blood pressure, or hypertension. How would you know if you had high blood pressure? Would you be able to feel it? The answer is no; HBP doesn't usually cause symptoms that we can feel (rarely, headaches may occur). That is why blood pressure checks are an important part of routine health care. You may get your blood pressure checked at regular doctor visits, at a senior center, or other site that offers screenings.

When you get your blood pressure checked, you should be given two numbers. These numbers are systolic pressure (produced as the heart beats) and diastolic pressure (as the heart relaxes between beats). Blood pressure is expressed as systolic over diastolic pressure. These numbers tell you whether or not your blood pressure is in a healthy range. Health professionals will interpret your blood pressure numbers and let you know if it is too high. Optimal blood pressure

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numbers are generally less than 120 over 80 mmHg. When blood pressure stays too high over a long period of time, many complications can result. HBP can lead to heart attacks and hardening of the arteries, stroke, heart failure, kidney damage, and even blindness.

Although blood pressure (particularly systolic) tends to rise as you get older, there are several other risk factors for HBP that we can control. These include being overweight or obese, smoking, drinking too much alcohol, physical inactivity, and eating too many foods high in salt (sodium) and low in nutrients such as potassium found in fruits and vegetables.

If you have HBP, or are at risk as most older people are, there are things you can do to help keep your blood pressure under control. First, talk with your doctor about your blood pressure numbers and take medications as recommended if they were prescribed to you. Several medications may be used to treat HBP, such as diuretics or “water pills.”

Following a healthful eating plan can also help you to lower blood pressure. Diets high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk products, and low

in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol are important for blood pressure and heart health. These foods also provide fiber and important vitamins and minerals, such as potassium and calcium. Eating less of foods high in salt and sodium can help to reduce blood pressure even more. See the recipe below that provides fruit, whole grain, and low-fat milk products as part of a heart healthy breakfast or snack.

For more information, see The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI), and the NHLBI DASH diet, <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>

Fruit and Yogurt Parfait (Serves 1)



Ingredients:

- ½ cup low-fat, low-calorie vanilla or fruit-flavored yogurt
- ½ cup canned peaches, packed in juice or water, drained, or seasonal fruit of choice (such as berries)
- ½ cup low-fat granola or other whole-grain cereal
- 2 tablespoons toasted pecans

Directions:

1. Begin by pouring about a third of the cereal into a parfait dish or small glass bowl.
2. Add about a third of the yogurt on top, then pile on a third of the fruit.
3. Continue layering the ingredients to make two more layers, ending with fruit.
4. Sprinkle the pecans on top and enjoy.