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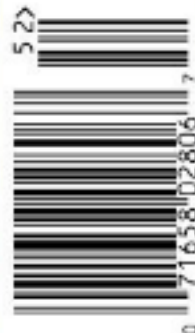


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MYTHS BUSTED!

10 TRUTHS EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND HEART DISEASE


It may surprise you to hear that much of what you believe about high blood pressure and women's heart disease risks could be based on outdated information. But it's true, so let's do a little myth busting. If you're a woman and you're not making heart-healthy decisions, it's time to make some lifestyle changes.

Myth: You only need to worry about high blood pressure after you reach menopause.

Fact: Blood pressure should be monitored throughout your entire life. Know your numbers and whether they are age-appropriate. Systolic blood pressure is measured on the heart beats and is written as the first number, before diastolic blood pressure, which measures the pressure between heartbeats. Even children can have elevated blood pressure, which may be due to genetics, obesity, or life habits. This needs to be followed from an early age.

A lot of women also don't realize that when they take birth control pills, regardless of the reason, they are at increased risk for stroke. I know of many women in their 20s and 30s who had no idea about this. Sadly, sometimes it takes a stroke for younger generations to understand this possibility.

New risks emerge in your 40s and 50s. During perimenopause and menopause, women's bodies go through hormonal changes as estrogen levels taper off. This is also when women may see a rise in their blood pressure.



Myth: Blood pressure in the 120/80 range is ideal.

Fact: Just as health experts have dropped the acceptable limits with respect to cholesterol and blood sugar, the same is now happening with blood pressure. Experts are re-thinking what's healthy. Too many people who have blood pressure in the 120/80 range are developing heart disease, and we're discovering that young people are at greater risk for developing heart disease later in life than we once thought.

The Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults Study (CARDIA) conducted by researchers at multiple locations including Johns Hopkins University, Northwestern University, University of Minnesota, and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NIH), followed nearly 2,500 healthy men and women of ages 18 to 30, for 25 years. The results revealed those whose blood pressure was in the prehypertension range (between 120/80 and 139/89) while they were still under 30 were more likely to have signs of heart disease when they reached middle age. Specifically, they were at higher risk of developing problems with their heart's left ventricle.

The results of the Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial (SPRINT) were presented at the American Heart Association (AHA) annual meeting. In that study, about 9,300 participants were seen regularly for four to eight years by blood pressure management experts. Researchers determined that maintaining blood pressure below the commonly recommended systolic target of 120 significantly reduced rates of cardiovascular disease and lowered the risk of death among adults age 50 and older diagnosed with high blood pressure. The AHA now suggests that blood pressure of 120/80 is the new lower limit to be considered hypertensive.

Take a five-minute walk every hour that you're at work. In an eight-hour day, you will accumulate 40 minutes of activity.

Myth: Following the US government's dietary guidelines is sufficient for heart-healthy nutrition.

Fact: The reality is the dietary guidelines aren't disease-specific. Yes, you should eat a variety of fruits and vegetables; their anti-inflammatory properties are excellent for heart health. Grapes in particular have long been recognized for their heart-health benefits. But these are general guidelines. You'd have to eat several pounds of grapes a day to get enough bioactives to make a difference. Consider taking a premium, clinically studied grape seed extract, such as MegaNatural-BP, once a day to help maintain healthy blood pressure. Grape-seed polyphenols may maintain the natural, supple elasticity of healthy blood vessels, contributing to a healthy cardiovascular system and ideal blood pressure.

Myth: Only men may experience a link between high blood pressure and libido.

Fact: Just as men who have high blood pressure may suffer from erectile dysfunction as a result, some physicians have noted that sexual performance issues in women may be an early warning sign of high blood pressure. Women who notice a lower libido or who have less interest in sex should talk with their physicians and get their blood pressure checked.

Myth: Exercise is too risky if you have heart disease.

Fact: You don't need to run marathons to get heart health benefits from exercise. Get your body moving for an effective way to help reduce your resting and exercising heart rate and blood pressure. You don't even need to stress about carving out 30 to 60 minutes at a time to work out. Your total physical activity can add up throughout the day. That's why physical activity trackers are so useful. Try the *Seven Minute Scientific Workout* app for

a quick workout. Or, take a five-minute walk every hour that you're at work. In an eight-hour day, you will accumulate 40 minutes of activity. If you have kids, exercise with them! Instead of sitting on the park bench talking with the other moms, get on the swing set and pump your legs.

Myth: You'll notice symptoms if you have elevated blood pressure.

Fact: There may not be any noticeable warning signs, or they may seem so insignificant that you just ignore them. That's why high blood pressure is often called the silent killer. For example, some people with high blood pressure may get headaches but attribute them to stress. Left unmanaged, high blood pressure can affect your overall health. That's why even eye doctors and dentists will check your blood pressure during your appointments.

Myth: Blood pressure readings taken at the doctor's office are usually accurate.

Fact: Most of time, your blood pressure is taken as soon as you walk into the room. What they don't take into account are all the stressors. You may have hurried to get to the appointment, your doctor isn't running on time, you just stepped on the scale, and you just sat down. The best time to have your blood pressure taken is at the end of the doctor's appointment, after you've been sitting and talking. Not after you have been moving, standing, sitting, and perhaps feeling hurried. You should be rested for five to ten minutes to get an accurate reading.

Myth: Stroke is the primary concern associated with high blood pressure.

Fact: Yes, stroke is a serious concern when you have elevated blood pressure. But what most women don't realize is that high blood pressure is the second leading cause of kidney failure. Healthy

Too many women make the mistake of waiting until they are in their 50s or 60s to start taking care of their hearts. If you are between 20 and 40 years old, you should already be doing all you can to maintain good health.

kidneys produce a hormone that helps the body regulate blood pressure. Your kidneys contain tiny blood vessels that are easily damaged by uncontrolled high blood pressure. As high blood pressure damages kidneys, this starts a negative spiral. Over time, the kidneys can fail. Because this takes several years to happen, it may be prevented with proper blood pressure monitoring and management.

Myth: Weight and body shape have little to do with blood pressure.

Fact: Maintaining a normal body weight is very important. If you're overweight, dropping as little as 10 percent of what you need to lose will result in an improvement in your blood pressure. Where you carry that extra weight also matters. As women age, their body fat tends to shift from their lower half to their midsection. In essence, they go from being a pear to being an apple, and their heart disease risk increases along with their abdominal fat.

Myth: There's no connection between sleep and high blood pressure.

Fact: Chronic insomnia increases your risk for hypertension. Getting seven to eight hours of quality sleep is important. If you're not sleeping well, talk with your doctor. There are times when sleep issues are caused by hormonal shifts in a woman's body.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEART HEALTH

Ladies, your personal health and well-being are just as important as the rest of your family's. Take care of yourself. Make—and keep—your doctor's appointments. Manage your stress. Take a close look at your lifestyle and determine what changes need to be made. You don't have to do a complete overhaul all at once, just see what's easiest to tackle and focus on that first—it may be switching from caffeinated beverages to water, or taking a walk during your work breaks instead of chatting with co-workers while seated.

Spread the word among your friends that high blood pressure is a silent killer if it's undetected. Be proactive about your blood pressure rather than reactive. Too many women make the mistake of waiting until they are in their 50s or 60s to start taking care of their hearts. If you are between 20 and 40 years old, you should already be doing all you can to maintain good health. A well-balanced diet, plenty of exercise, and smart supplementation may help us avoid diseases to which we are prone. [➔](#)

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