



CARDIOSMART: WHEN HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE REMAINS HIGH

WHEN HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE REMAINS HIGH

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CardioSmart December 1, 2008--Healthier blood pressure means better protection against heart disease and stroke. But what happens if you're part of a growing number of people whose blood pressure continues to soar despite drug treatment?



High blood pressure that remains elevated despite maximum dose treatment with at least 3 medications is called "resistant hypertension." The actual number of patients with this problem is not known, but estimates run from 5% of patients in general medical practice to as many as 50% of patients with kidney disease. These numbers are expected to grow as the population ages and rates of obesity, sleep apnea, and kidney disease all rise.

Sometimes, high blood pressure is not actually "resistant" to treatment, but rather remains elevated due to lifestyle factors, inadequate medication doses, or medication combinations which are simply not optimal for an individual patient. "There's no question that resistant hypertension can be treated from what we know about lifestyle modifications and fixed-dose drug combinations," says George L. Bakris, MD, a hypertensive disease specialist and professor of medicine at the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine.

Here's what you can do to bring your pressure down to acceptable levels, even when treatment appears to have failed:

Get more active in measuring your blood pressure

Blood pressure readings in the doctor's office are not always indicative of blood pressure readings in general. Monitoring your blood pressures with a home blood pressure monitor may provide very valuable data regarding your blood pressure control overall. Ask your health care provider about types of blood pressure monitors available, and bring your home monitor with you to your next doctor's appointment so that its accuracy can be validated against the blood pressure cuff in the office. Normal blood pressure readings fall at or below 120/80 mmHg. For patients with hypertension, consistently attaining readings below 140/90 mmHg is the minimum goal.

Discuss your medications with your doctor

Experts agree that aggressive therapy, which involves taking several medications, will reduce hypertension. Go over dosage and combination options with your doctor. Sometimes simply

increasing the dose will result in adequate blood pressure control. Combination medications (usually two drugs in one pill) can make dosing more convenient.

Take your medications as prescribed

One of the reasons patients fail to control their blood pressure is that they don't take their medications as instructed. Make sure you are timing your doses correctly - according to time of day and as related to food intake.

Read labels

"One of the most common causes of resistant hypertension is ingestion of very high sodium diets," Dr. Bakris says. "People underestimate the power of what salt can do to their blood pressure, especially if they are older and obese." Eliminate hidden sources of sodium in your diet by reading labels on packaged foods and requesting sodium content information in restaurants. The maximum amount of sodium you should consume is 2400 mg per day. Some restaurant entrees contain as much as 6000 mg of sodium.

Inventory your medicine cabinet

Medications that could interfere with blood pressure control include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs, such as naproxen and ibuprofen), oral contraceptives, and certain herbal supplements such as ginseng. Some decongestants and weight loss drugs can also raise blood pressure.

Take action

Lifestyle changes play a powerful role in fighting off high blood pressure. People are in a position in most cases, to modify the number of pills they are taking based on their lifestyle, Dr. Bakris says. To get better, quit smoking, minimize salt and saturated fat in your diet, exercise regularly, and limit alcohol consumption, he says. Excess weight contributes to high blood pressure. Attaining and maintaining a sensible weight is critical to managing your hypertension.

What if your blood pressure is still "resistant"?

If despite all these measures, your blood pressure readings still consistently fall above 140/90 mmHg, referral to a hypertension specialist may be required. At this point, evaluation for kidney disease, blood vessel problems, or a hormonal imbalance may be indicated.

Regardless, do not merely accept high blood pressure readings as something to "watch" or "follow" unless there is a defined long term plan. High blood pressure contributes to stroke, heart disease, and death. Optimal blood pressure control is key to your good health and longevity.

An overview on resistant hypertension is published in the November 25, 2008 issue of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*.

Sources:

Sarafidis PA et al. Resistant Hypertension: An Overview of Evaluation and Treatment. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 2008.