May is High Blood Pressure and Mental Health Awareness Month

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10 Questions (and Answers) About Monitoring Your Blood Pressure

*Here are some tips for checking your blood pressure.*

1. Why might it be useful for me to monitor my blood pressure?
   If your doctor has suggested you monitor your blood pressure, he or she likely wants to keep a close eye on it. High blood pressure, or hypertension, can cause serious damage to your body. It puts you at risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney failure—ant that's just the short list. Controlling your blood pressure is important, and the only way to know whether it is high is to measure it.

2. Why not just check it when I’m at the doctor’s office?
Convenience is one reason. It is easier for you to monitor it at home or at work than it is for you to make frequent trips to your doctor’s office. Another reason is that your blood pressure rises and falls throughout the day, every day. So a reading taken at a doctor’s office may not be typical of your normal blood pressure. Also, a visit to the doctor’s office may cause some people’s blood pressure to rise—a condition called “white coat hypertension.” Monitoring your blood pressure can give you a better idea of your status.

3. Are there some people for whom self-monitoring may be especially useful?
Yes. The list includes:
- People whose high blood pressure was recently diagnosed. By checking their blood pressure regularly, they can see how their treatment is working.
- People with health conditions that require close monitoring of blood pressure, such as those who have diabetes, heart disease or kidney disease.
- Pregnant women who may be at risk for a serious condition called preeclampsia, or hypertension caused by pregnancy.
- Older adults who may be more prone to white coat hypertension.

4. Where can I buy a blood pressure monitor?
You can find them at discount drugstores and pharmacies, among other places.

5. How do I know what type is best for me?
Talk with your doctor before you buy a blood pressure monitor. You also may want to ask a pharmacist to help you choose a model at the store.

6. Is there anything I should look for on the label?
Look for a monitor that is certified to meet international standards. If you are pregnant or overweight, you may want to buy one that is approved for your condition.

7. How can I be sure I am using my monitor correctly?
It is a good idea to take your new monitor to your doctor’s office. Your doctor can check the machine for accuracy and show you how to use it correctly.

8. How can I help ensure accurate readings?
Don’t smoke, drink caffeinated beverages or exercise 30 minutes before you take a reading. These things can raise your blood pressure. Also, always follow all the instructions that come with the unit.

9. How often should I check my blood pressure?
Talk with your doctor. Sometimes once a day or once a week is enough. Or your doctor may want several readings throughout the day to be sure your blood pressure is under control all day long.

10. Do I still need to go to my doctor’s office?
Yes. Checking your blood pressure is not a substitute for regular doctor visits. Keep all of your appointments, especially if you are under treatment for high blood pressure, diabetes or heart or kidney disease. Even if your blood pressure readings are normal, it’s still important to visit your doctor. Take a record of your blood pressure readings with you to each appointment.

Lift Your Mood with Exercise

Physical activity could offer benefits if you are battling mild depression.

Physical activity can have all sorts of beneficial effects. It may even help those 10
percent of American adults who have been diagnosed with depression.

Research has suggested that:

- Active people are less depressed than inactive people are.
- Regular exercise may prevent mild to moderate depression from coming back or help keep it controlled over time.
- Regular exercise may improve a person’s outlook. It offers a sense of competence and achievement. It can diminish the impact of stress. It may help take your mind off your troubles and improve your sleep.

**Exercise and mood: what’s the connection?**

Some studies have found that exercise can improve symptoms of mild depression. But the effects can take longer than with antidepressant medications. And exercise may not have long-term benefits in more severe cases of depression.

One theory of research suggests that when you exercise, you increase the level of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a chemical that affects mood, sleep, appetite and sex drive. Depression has been linked to low levels of serotonin. Exercise also is believed to stimulate the production of endorphins, the brain’s “feel-good” chemicals. Other theories suggest beneficial changes and responses to other hormones in the body.

**Depression and the exercise challenge**

Exercise may help lift your mood, a good reason all by itself to stay motivated. People with depression or other mental illnesses have another reason to get off the couch and get going. Studies show that if you have a mental illness, there is a good chance you are at higher risk for heart disease. Risk factors for heart disease include obesity, cigarette smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes. We can have a positive impact on these risk factors by exercising.

**Take the first steps**

If you suspect you might be suffering from depression, it’s important for you to be diagnosed so you can get the care you need.

Talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise routine. Your doctor can advise you regarding what type of exercises are best for you and what level of intensity to pursue. Next, try these strategies to help you get started and be successful:

- **Pick an activity you like.** You’re more likely to stick with it if you enjoy it. Do you like to walk? Jog? Bike? Dance? Swim? Take a class?
- **Ask a friend to join you.** In addition to keeping you accountable, friends can provide an extra boost of motivation when it gets tough. Everyone has those days when they just don’t feel like working out and those times when they want to call it quits. Friends can offer encouragement to keep you going. Just be sure to return the favor.
- **Start slowly.** You have a better chance of continuing a moderate plan than if you jump into a strenuous program. Working out too hard actually can postpone the mood lift that often follows an exercise session. That mood-boost is rewarding, and without it, your motivation can be weakened.
- **Cut yourself some slack.** There may be days you just don’t feel up to exercising. If you miss a day or can only do 10 minutes, that’s fine. Just get back on track the next day.
- **Remember the benefits.** Physical activity may help improve your mood, and it can also strengthen your heart and bones, help control your weight and cut your risk for many diseases. Each time you exercise, you’re doing something positive for your health.

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**7 Tips for Easing Workplace Tension**
Disagreements at work can seriously undermine your career. Here are some ways to handle them.

Today's work environment is stressful. Many employees have been forced to do more because of shrinking staffs. They must learn new skills to stay up to date. They may fear being laid off.

When people don’t get along, or there’s a disagreement, it can be very hard to get things done. It impairs productivity and teamwork. But there are ways to tackle conflicts.

Here are seven tips for easing tensions on the job:

1. **Listen**
   We want other people to listen to us. We must also listen to them. Conflicts can’t be solved unless both sides practice active listening. Make sure to listen for the words as well as notice the other person's body language. If there is anything you find confusing or think you may have misunderstood, always ask for clarification. This can avoid misunderstandings further down the road.

2. **Think before reacting**
   Being in a tension-filled situation can set us off. We may say things without thinking them through. That can damage relationships. It’s important to consider how our words or actions might be interpreted.

3. **Attack the problem, not the person**
   Emotions can run high during a disagreement. Our gut reaction may be to lash out. Try to figure out the problem behind the person. Get unstuck from past resentments.

4. **Accept responsibility**
   Every person involved in a conflict plays a part. Avoid blaming. It leads to anger and resentment. Accept your part of the situation. Only then can conflict be resolved.

5. **Speak directly**
   Use “I” statements to express your feelings, desires and concerns. They are clearer and less threatening than “you” statements. As an example, think about the difference between these two: “I need more information” vs. “You never give me enough information.” “You” statements tend to be blaming or accusatory.

6. **Look for common interests**
   Try to figure out what everyone involved in the conflict has in common. What is really important about the issue? What is an outcome that everyone wants? What is a shared goal? How does this fit into the big picture work-wise?

7. **Focus forward**
   Work to figure out why the two of you clash. Then focus on how you will behave going forward. What can be done differently in the future to avoid the conflict?
Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD
May 10, 2016, 12:30 p.m. ET, 11:30 a.m. CT, 10:30 a.m. MT, 9:30 a.m. PT

Sometimes it’s difficult to make the right food choices especially when faced with temptation and confusion from conflicting advice. But it doesn’t have to be. Discover good nutrition – it is the foundation of good health! When combined with exercise, a nutritious diet may improve your health, help you lose weight, lower your cholesterol level, and improve the way your body functions on a regular basis. Join us for this informative seminar on how to make healthy choices. Learn all about the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, types and amounts of food and beverages you may need, super foods, hot nutrition trends, along with simple swaps, tips and tricks that could help you improve your diet by making better choices.

To register for an upcoming Source4Women seminar, visit www.source4women.com and click on "Online Seminars & Events." All seminars are recorded and archived for viewing after the live seminar date.

We Dare You!

Test your health insurance knowledge with our May dares!

We Dare You to:
1. Answer one of our quiz questions about pharmacy benefits.
2. Complete a puzzle and learn about your health benefits.
3. Watch a video about using your benefits and take our poll.

Participate in one or more of the dares for a chance to win a $400 Visa gift card! #WeDareYou

Click here to get started! #WeDareYou

Health Tip

Even if you aren't sure or don't currently have high blood pressure, you can take steps to keep your blood pressure under control. Consider these lifestyle choices:

- Follow a healthy eating plan that includes limiting the amount of sodium and alcohol that you consume
- Lose weight if you're overweight or obese
- Exercise regularly
- Quit smoking
- Manage your stress

If you have high blood pressure, your doctor will recommend treatment options to prevent long-term problems. In addition to recommending heart healthy lifestyle choices, your doctor may prescribe medication or a special diet.
Healthy Recipe: Spaghetti with Roasted Zucchini

Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients:
12 oz. spaghetti
3 Tbsp. olive oil
2 1/2 slices fresh bread, torn into 1-in. pieces
2 cloves garlic, smashed
4 small zucchini (about 1 lb. total), sliced 1/4-in. thick
1/4 to 1/2 tsp. crushed red pepper
Kosher salt
1/4 cup grated Parmesan (1 oz.)
1/4 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped
1 Tbsp. grated lemon zest

Directions:

1. Heat oven to 425°F. Cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain the pasta and return to the pot. Toss the pasta with 1 Tbsp. oil.
2. Meanwhile, in a food processor, pulse the bread and garlic until the bread forms coarse crumbs and the garlic is chopped.
3. In a large bowl, toss the zucchini, red pepper, remaining 2 Tbsp. oil and 1/2 tsp. salt. Add the Parmesan and bread crumb mixture and toss to combine. Spread the zucchini mixture on two rimmed baking sheets and roast until the zucchini is tender and golden brown, 10 to 12 minutes.
4. Toss the pasta with the zucchini mixture, parsley and lemon zest.

Nutrition Facts:
Calories: 496
Fat: 14g
Saturated Fat: 3g
Cholesterol: 4mg
Sodium: 448mg
Carbohydrates: 76g
Dietary Fiber: 6g
Protein: 16g

From the Food Editors of Woman's Day

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