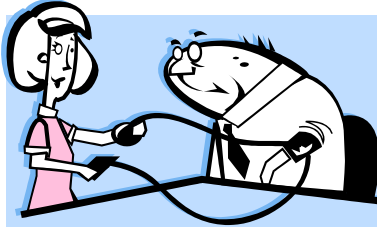




## **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND YOUR KIDNEYS**



### **Facts about high blood pressure (hypertension):**

- It is called a “silent killer” because you can have it for years without knowing it.
- It is a leading cause of heart attacks, strokes, and chronic kidney disease (CKD).
- Controlling high blood pressure reduces the risk of these complications.
- High blood pressure can often be controlled by losing excess weight, exercising more, not smoking, and cutting down on salt.

### **What is blood pressure?**

Blood pressure is measured with a blood pressure cuff wrapped around your upper arm. The top number in your blood pressure reading is called the systolic pressure and the bottom number is the diastolic pressure. Normal blood pressure is below 120/80, which is said as “120 over 80.” The top number is the pressure in your blood vessels (arteries) when your heart beats. The bottom number is the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests between beats.

### **What is high blood pressure?**

High blood pressure (also called hypertension) occurs when the force of your blood against your artery walls increases enough to cause damage. For people who have diabetes or chronic kidney disease, blood pressure of 130/80 or more is considered high.

### **What causes high blood pressure?**

The exact cause of high blood pressure is not known in many cases. However, your chances of developing high blood pressure may be increased if you:

- Have a family history of high blood pressure
- Have chronic kidney disease (CKD)
- Are overweight
- Are African American
- Use a lot of table salt, eat a lot of packaged or fast foods
- Use birth control pills
- Have diabetes
- Use illegal drugs

- Drink large amounts of alcohol (beer, wine, or liquor)

### **How can high blood pressure hurt me?**

Untreated high blood pressure can damage your heart, brain, eyes, and kidneys. This damage can lead to heart attacks, strokes, and kidney failure. High blood pressure can lead to difficulties with having sex such as getting erections. If you also have diabetes, your chance of developing these other conditions is even greater. For this reason it is important to keep your blood sugar under control.

### **How are high blood pressure and kidney disease related?**

Some types of kidney disease may cause high blood pressure. More often it is high blood pressure that causes kidney disease. High blood pressure can speed up the loss of kidney function in people with kidney disease. Your doctor or nurse practitioner can tell how much kidney damage you've had by measuring the amount of protein in your urine and estimating your total kidney function from a simple blood test.

### **What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?**

You may not have any symptoms of high blood pressure. Occasionally, people with high blood pressure may have headaches or change in vision.

### **How is blood pressure treated?**

If you have diabetes or chronic kidney disease your target blood pressure is 130/80 or even lower. If your blood pressure is not at target, you may be asked to make the following lifestyle changes:

- Lose excess weight
- Exercise more
- Cut down on salt
- Cut back on alcohol
- Stop smoking



If these steps do not control your blood pressure, you may need medications. Sometimes several different blood pressure medications may be needed to get your blood pressure down to goal. If you have diabetes or chronic kidney disease, you may be prescribed special high blood pressure medications called ACE inhibitors or ARBs. Studies have shown that the medications may help to protect your kidney functions.

### **What do I do if my medication causes side effects?**

If you have side effects such as dizziness, tiredness, headaches or difficulties with erections, call your doctor or nurse practitioner. We may be able to change your medication to one that works better for you. Never change the way you take your medication without checking with your doctor or nurse practitioner first.

*Adapted from the National Kidney Foundation brochure "High Blood Pressure and Your Kidneys, 2006 edition.*