



COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



PERSPECTIVE

High Blood Pressure ... Common, but Fixable

Nearly one in three adults has high blood pressure—that's approximately 25,000 individuals in Putnam County. Of these, more than half do not have it under control, and many don't even know they have this silent, potentially serious condition because usually there are no symptoms until it is too late. The only way to be sure is to check with a blood pressure cuff. Left untreated, high blood pressure can have deadly consequences, including heart disease and stroke.

The good news is that unlike many other health problems, high blood pressure, also called hypertension, is completely correctable and controllable with the right balance of medications. Sometimes it takes a little effort to get the prescription and dosage adjusted, but it's well worth it. Once your treatment regime is established, it can be easily maintained. That's why blood pressure checks are so important—both to detect and to monitor the condition, and why the Health Department provides periodic blood pressure screenings for employees and is investigating the feasibility of expanding this program to other worksites.

Hypertension may be symptomless, but known factors can put you at higher risk. If your parents or a close blood relative have had high blood pressure, there is a greater chance you will get it. Age and weight also play a role. Blood vessels lose elasticity as we age and this can increase pressure. Additional pounds also add strain on the heart, raise blood cholesterol and negatively affect the lipid levels in your blood. Behavioral habits play a role too—a sedentary lifestyle with little physical activity; a poor diet, especially one with too much salt, and regular, or heavy, alcohol use are also factors. High levels of stress, smoking and sleep apnea may be linked but the research is still inconclusive. These are harmful for other health reasons, so if you need help with them, a visit to your doctor is a good first step.

For better nutrition, consider the "DASH" diet, short for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH), as it was originally intended. This research-based diet comes highly recommended—and not just for those with high blood pressure, but for anyone who wants to eat healthy. It is rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and provides the necessary nutrients, such as potassium, magnesium, calcium and fiber that keep your cardiovascular system in shape.

For more information on taking care of your heart you can visit the American Heart Association online at www.heart.org For more information on the DASH diet you can visit www.dashdiet.org

*Allen Beals, MD
Commissioner of Health
Putnam County Department of Health*