

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Managing Your Blood Pressure**

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High blood pressure (hypertension) is a leading risk factor for death due to heart disease and stroke. Women, in particular, have a difficult time controlling blood pressure. A recent report in the journal, *Hypertension* (February 2008), noted that fewer than 60% of US women with hypertension had their blood pressure under control. This, along with an increase in obesity, may account for an alarming increase in strokes among middle-aged women. In the last national health and nutrition survey (1999 to 2004), 2 percent of women aged 35 to 54 years had suffered a stroke. This number is up from 0.5 percent in the previous survey (1988 to 1994) and corresponded to an increase in the average body mass index or BMI (from 27 to 29) and a 2-inch increase in average waist size among women. What's a woman to do?

First, know your risk. Go to www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/index.htm to calculate your BMI. Measure your waist circumference with no clothes on, looking in a mirror to help you find the right place. Measure the smallest area, just above the belly button and right after you breathe out. BMI greater than 30 and waist circumference greater than 35 inches (40 inches for men) increases the risk for hypertension as well other chronic diseases.

Know your blood pressure. Optimal blood pressure is less than 120/80; hypertension is 140/90 or greater; numbers in between are considered borderline hypertension. Most people do not need medication for borderline hypertension, but blood pressure often increases as we age. So someone with borderline hypertension is likely to develop high blood pressure without lifestyle changes.

Drink more milk. Women who drank two or more servings of fat-free milk per day were 10% less likely to have high blood pressure compared to those who drank fat-free milk less than one time per month.

Eat more fruits and vegetables. Diets high in fruits and vegetables tend to decrease blood pressure, probably because of the potassium.

Decrease salt intake. Decreasing salt intake will lower blood pressure, especially in those with hypertension. People who decrease their salt intake report that foods taste better after they get used to lower salt.

Increase your intake of nuts (unsalted) and whole grains. Both are good sources of magnesium, another nutrient that is linked to lower blood pressure.

Take a walk. Physical activity makes your heart beat more efficiently and decreases your stress level – two great ways to lower blood pressure!

WVU Extension Service's Love Your Heart Movement is adapted from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's campaign and is targeted to help West Virginians become educated and enabled to take charge of their own health.

To learn more about ways WVU Extension uses trusted research and local experts to empower citizens to improve their health, visit www.ext.wvu.edu, or contact your local office of the WVU Extension Service.

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