# May is National High Blood Pressure Awareness Month

May 11, 2012 By Rhonda Peters

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The Center for Disease Control has marked May as National High Blood Pressure Awareness Month in an effort to raise awareness of its impact on one's health. According to research, 1 out of every 3 American adults faces high blood pressure and every 40 seconds someone has a stroke! High blood pressure is the fourth leading cause of death in United States of America! [1]

The following are FIVE things you should know about this health issue [2]:

1. The definition of High blood pressure
High blood pressure (sometimes called hypertension) is the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps blood. It can cause a number of things to occur such as coronary heart disease, heart failure, stroke, kidney failure, etc.

2. The Symptoms of High Blood Pressure
Sometimes the symptoms aren't obvious, such as numbness or weakness of the arm or leg or trouble seeing in one or both eyes, and other times the symptoms are distinguished like chest pains/tightening, severe headaches, slurred speech, dizziness, trouble walking/balancing. If you experience any of these symptoms, seek medical assistant immediately!

3. How to interpret the blood pressure levels
Blood pressure is measure by Systolic and diastolic numbers. A normal blood pressure should have a systolic number of 120mmHG and a diastolic number of 80mmHG or lower for each. If the numbers are higher, then you will be categorized as the following:

- Pre-hypertension: 120 - 139mmHG (systolic) or 80 - 89mmHG (diastolic)
- High blood pressure (Stage 1): 140 - 149mmHG (systolic) or 90 - 99mmHG (diastolic)
- High blood pressure (Stage 2): 150mmHG or higher (systolic)or 100mmHG or higher (diastolic)

4. The Causes of High Blood Pressure
There are a number of factors that could cause high blood pressure to occur. The following is a subset of some of the causes:

- Stress
- Unhealthy Eating Lifestyle (High sodium diet, large intake of processed foods, large amount of alcohol consumption, smoking, or lack of physical activity.)
- obesity
- Age
- Certain medications
- Kidney or thyroid disease
- Sleep apnea

5. Ways to prevent or reduce blood pressure?
First, consult your health care provider before beginning any changes in diet or medication. Secondly, work with your health care provider/nutritionist to transition to a healthier lifestyle one that includes exercise with a healthy diet--more vegetables, less sodium and less processed foods. You will start to see improved results!

High blood pressure impacts many families, especially many African American families, including mine! Let's do what we can to spread the awareness!

Sources:
[1]"May is Stroke Awareness Month; Know Your Risks." National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Million Hearts. April 23, 2012. http://www.cdc.gov/Features/HighBloodPressure/.
[2] "What Is High Blood Pressure?" National Heart Lungs and Blood Institute. April 01, 2011.

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