

PREVENT HYPERTENSION

- By Althea Shah, Fitness Expert & Sports Nutritionist

Is your lifestyle killing you. The biggest cause for hypertension is stress. Unhealthy lifestyles; food habits, stress and lack of physical activity are some of the causes of hypertension which causes the arteries that supply blood and oxygen to the brain to burst or be blocked, leading to a stroke.

LEARN TO KEEP A CHECK ON YOUR HEART & CONTROL YOUR PRESSURE.

Lower your risk for problems from high blood pressure, such as heart disease and stroke and live a stress-free life.

REDUCE STRESS

Too much of worrying puts pressure on your physical and mental state causing stress. The body readies itself to fight back by producing larger quantities of the chemicals cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine. This makes the person more alert, increases blood pressure and pulse rate but reduces immune system and slows down the digestive process.

TIP: Try some relaxation techniques like meditation, aromatherapy or reflexology in your daily schedule to reduce stress. Listen to music; Make time for hobbies

EAT HEALTHY

Eating foods with excess sodium, sugar, processed foods and meats high in saturated fats makes your heart work harder than normal, increasing your blood pressure as you need more blood going to your digestive system. Eating foods high in refined carbohydrates and sugar increases blood sugar and insulin levels, which may lead to diabetes over time.

TIP: Include whole grains; Reduce unhealthy fats; Reduce salt; Eat more vegetables and fruit. Include foods rich in potassium, fiber, protein and lower in saturated fat to improve your heart health. Include fiber at each meal to prevent spikes in blood sugar and insulin levels and help control diabetes. Drink enough water; Cut sugar from your diet; Avoid refined carbohydrates.

MANAGE YOUR WEIGHT

Obese people require more blood to supply oxygen and nutrients to their bodies and in turn will require more pressure to move this blood around. This causes harmful changes in the heart's structure and function that can eventually lead to heart failure.

TIP: Include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats in fish, nuts, olive & flaxseed oils to improve the health of your heart and blood vessels.

Work to increase HDL or 'Good cholesterol', with a healthy diet, regular exercise and medication which picks up excess cholesterol and takes it back to your liver to metabolise.

Increase soluble fibre; Reduce saturated fats; Consume more of plant protein

INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

It's no secret that regular physical activity helps to keep you in good health. Regular activity increases the smaller blood vessels i.e. the collateral blood vessels that connect different coronary arteries. These serve as an alternate route to supply blood to the heart muscle that may be blocked and help prevent an attack.

TIP: When it's exercised, the heart can pump more blood through the body and continue working at optimal efficiency with little strain. Regular exercise also helps to keep arteries and other blood vessels flexible, ensuring good blood flow and normal blood pressure.

Do at least 30 to 60 minutes of activity daily which will give you mental well-being and stress relief with increased bone strength, and better metabolism when combined with weight-bearing exercises. Do any activity that raises your heart rate such as walking, cycling, swimming or dancing.

LIMIT EXCESS SMOKING & ALCOHOL

Smoking causes thickening and narrowing of blood vessels with the build-up of plaque, making the heart work harder. Smoking also makes blood sticky and more likely to clot, which can block blood flow to the heart and brain. Alcohol causes mental imbalance where a person loses control over his actions and emotions.

TIP: Practice relaxation techniques; Chew on a fruit to kill the craving. Dine early to avoid temptation; Switch to a non-alcoholic beverage.

Quit smoking to help reverse any damage to the heart.

Limit alcohol to protect the most important organ in your body, your liver which filters your blood, detoxifies chemicals and metabolises drugs.