



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Stop the “Silent Killer”

Progress Toward Meeting the Target for High Blood Pressure Control – United States, 2010-2012

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Karen Hunter] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I’m Karen Hunter, filling in for your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a major contributor to heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. Approximately one in three adults have high blood pressure.

Dr. Matthew Ritchey is a researcher with CDC’s National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. He’s joining us today to discuss the importance of controlling high blood pressure. Welcome to the show, Dr. Ritchey.

[Dr. Ritchey] Thank you, Karen.

[Karen Hunter] Dr. Ritchey, what is blood pressure?

[Dr. Ritchey] Blood pressure is the force of the blood against your artery walls as it circulates through your body, and it’s measured using two different numbers. The upper number, or the systolic, represents the pressure on your blood vessels when your heart beats. The lower number, or the diastolic, represents the pressure in your vessels when your heart rests between beats. Your blood pressure is considered high if you have a number of 140 over 90 or greater.

[Karen Hunter] Is uncontrolled blood pressure a problem in the United States?

[Dr. Ritchey] Yes it is, Karen. While it has been improving over the past several years, unfortunately we still have about 30 million U.S. adults who have uncontrolled blood pressure. And the problem with this is it puts them at increased risk for things such as heart attacks and strokes and, ultimately, that is what we are trying to prevent.

[Karen Hunter] What are the symptoms of hypertension?

[Dr. Ritchey] Well, hypertension is typically referred to as the “silent killer” because it has no signs or symptoms. So, what you have to do is have your blood pressure regularly checked by your health care provider.

[Karen Hunter] How often should we have our blood pressure checked?

[Dr. Ritchey] Well, it kind of depends on the person but a good rule of thumb is to visit your health care provider regularly to have your blood pressure checked. And then, in between visits, you can also check it on your own at home, using a blood pressure monitor that you've purchased. And then you can communicate those findings to your physician or your health care provider so they can be kept aware of where you are with your blood pressure.

[Karen Hunter] Give our listeners some tips for controlling high blood pressure.

[Dr. Ritchey] Well, ideally we work at not having high blood pressure in the first place. And we do that by exercising regularly, we can work to try to maintain a healthy weight, and then also we can eat a diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables, and within that diet, we also want to reduce the amount of sodium that we're taking in. And some of the key places to do that is reading labels on processed foods, watching what we eat when we're going out to eat at restaurants, and that sort of thing.

[Karen Hunter] Dr. Ritchey, where can listeners get more information about hypertension?

[Dr. Ritchey] Listeners can go to cdc.gov/bloodpressure.

[Karen Hunter] Thanks, Dr. Ritchey. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Matthew Ritchey about the importance of controlling high blood pressure.

To decrease your risk for hypertension, eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and food low in sodium, exercise regularly, and limit alcohol use. If you have high blood pressure, take your medication as prescribed. Hypertension is sometimes called the "silent killer" because it doesn't always have signs or symptoms, so talk to a health care provider about getting your blood pressure checked regularly.

Until next time, be well. This is Karen Hunter for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.