



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Dealing with High Blood Pressure

Prevalence of and Actions to Control High Blood Pressure in 20 States, 2005

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds.

Blood pressure is the force inside your blood vessels when your heart beats. When your blood pressure stays high most of the time, it's called hypertension or high blood pressure. It can cause stroke or heart problems. Hypertension can be a silent killer because a person can have high blood pressure and not even have symptoms.

Today we are talking with Dr. Clark Denny about the dangers of high blood pressure. Dr. Denny and his colleagues in CDC's Division of Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention recently published a study investigating how Americans in twenty states are dealing with their high blood pressure.

Welcome to the show, Dr. Denny.

[Dr. Denny] Thank you Matthew. It's a pleasure to be here.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Denny, can you help our listeners understand what high blood pressure is and why it's so important to treat?

[Dr. Denny] I hope so, here, let me give it a try. Blood pressure as you said is the pressure against the arteries. And high blood pressure is important to treat because if blood pressure stays high it can lead to hardening of the arteries, stroke, or heart disease. When we think of blood pressure we usually think of two numbers, a top

number and a bottom number. The top is the systolic and that is the pressure when the heart contracts and normally that should be less than 120. The bottom number is the diastolic that's the pressure between beats when the heart's at rest. And normally, that should be less than 80.

[Matthew Reynolds] Is high blood pressure common?

[Dr. Denny] Yes. About 30% of adults in the United States have high blood pressure and that translates to 72 million adults. And a lot of people don't realize they have high blood pressure. So, we need to get our blood pressure checked regularly. American Heart Association recommends checking it every two years if you don't have a history of high blood pressure or a family history of high blood pressure. If you do, your doctor would have to tell you how often to have it checked.

[Matthew Reynolds] Are there some people more likely to have high blood pressure than others?

[Dr. Denny] It is more common among certain groups, for instance, older people are more likely, African Americans more likely, people who are overweight or are obese are more likely. And also someone can look perfectly health and not be overweight and still have high blood pressure and not know it. And so they need to have it regularly checked to make sure they don't have it. And that is why it's called the "silent killer."

[Matthew Reynolds] You've just published a report about high blood pressure. Would you tell us about the study?

[Dr. Denny] This is a study where we used data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, that's a telephone survey. And we asked people who had high blood pressure about what actions they were taking to control that high blood pressure. So we asked them about their diet, their salt intake, their alcohol intake, their exercise, and their medication. And we found that almost everybody was doing something. For

example almost 70% of people reported exercising but that still means that about 30% are not exercising who perhaps could be exercising. And maybe some of those 70% of people who are exercising could exercise more.

[Matthew Reynolds] You've already mentioned that the way to avoid heart problems and stroke is to control our high blood pressure. What should we be doing to remain healthy?

[Dr. Denny] In general, and especially in terms of high blood pressure, we need to make exercise part of our regular routine, watch our weight, eat a low fat diet with abundance of fruits and vegetables, try to cut back on salt, if you do drink alcohol, drink it moderately, and if you smoke, you should try to quit. Also, if you're prescribed medication, you should take that medication as prescribed. And if your having problems with that you should consult with your physician about your problems with your medication.

[Matthew Reynolds] Do most people with high blood pressure have it under control?

[Dr. Denny] Sadly, the answer is "no." Most people could have it under control if they took their medication as prescribed or worked with their doctor to make sure that their medication is correct. And also to take the actions, lifestyle changes, to control it. We found that even though almost everybody is taking some action that more action needs to be taken and that in reality only about 30% of people have it under control, though almost everyone could.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Denny, thank you for taking the time to talk with us today.

[Dr. Denny] Well, you're welcome. Thank you very much for inviting me.

[Matthew Reynolds] That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

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