



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Take the Pressure off Your Heart

National High Blood Pressure Education Month — May 2016

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

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

Heart disease and stroke are leading causes of death in the U.S. High blood pressure, or hypertension, can lead to both.

Dr. Fleetwood Loustalot is a researcher with CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. He's joining us today to discuss the health consequences of hypertension. Welcome to the show, Fleetwood.

[Dr. Loustalot] Thanks for having me, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Fleetwood, let's start with how many Americans have high blood pressure?

[Dr. Loustalot] Bob, about 70 million adults have high blood pressure, or hypertension, and the majority of those don't have it under control, leaving significant room for improvement.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is any particular group at high risk for having hypertension?

[Dr. Loustalot] Definitely, Bob. Older adults are at high risk and are more likely to have the condition, as are certain race-ethnic groups, particularly African Americans. There're also a number of health conditions where hypertension is more common. A prime example of this is diabetes, where the majority of those with diabetes also have hypertension.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the symptoms?

[Dr. Loustalot] The majority of those with hypertension will have no symptoms. That's why it's extremely important to have blood pressure checked and monitored on a regular basis. A really good location to have your blood pressure monitored is in the clinic setting. Health care providers are well aware of what is needed to help with the screening and treatment of hypertension and they can individually tailor recommendations to help with your care. Another option is to have blood pressure monitored in the home. There are many good quality machines that can be used by yourself to monitor your own blood pressure, in your home, and you can record those numbers and transmit them back to your health care provider to help be more actively engaged in your care.

[Dr. Gaynes] Fleetwood, what happens to someone's health if hypertension is uncontrolled?

[Dr. Loustalot] There are many negative effects of long term, uncontrolled hypertension. In particular, heart attacks, strokes, heart failure, and chronic kidney disease are highly frequent. There's also emerging evidence that uncontrolled blood pressure can be linked with dementia in later life.

[Dr. Gaynes] Can blood pressure be prevented or controlled?

[Dr. Loustalot] Absolutely, Bob. A healthy lifestyle is the cornerstone and foundation to the prevention and management of high blood pressure. A healthy lifestyle includes a healthy diet, one that includes foods that are high in whole grain, fresh fruits and vegetables, and foods that are low in sodium, or salt. Physical activity should be performed regularly and walking is the most common form of physical activity. If you smoke, you need to stop, and if you haven't started, don't. Limiting alcohol intake also helps to prevent and manage high blood pressure. And even with that healthy lifestyle, the majority will *still* need to take medications to get control of their blood pressure. The good news is, is that many of these medications are low cost and highly effective.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about high blood pressure?

[Dr. Loustalot] Listeners can go to cdc.gov/bloodpressure, one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Fleetwood. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Fleetwood Loustalot about the dangers of high blood pressure.

Remember: Hypertension is commonly treated with medication, but exercise and a healthy diet can lower blood pressure. Regular checkups are important for diagnosing and treating this common condition.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for A Cup of Health with CDC.

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