
Nurse Nik: High Blood Pressure Remains a Silent Killer in Our Community.

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Do you know your blood pressure? Are you African American? Did your parents have high blood pressure? Do they take medication and are they compliant? These are questions that all African Americans should ask themselves. In the U.S 41% of blacks have high blood pressure compared to 27% of whites (Beckerman, 2019).

Extremely high blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart attacks, heart disease and acute kidney damage. All of which can lead to an early death. Environmental factors such as stress, increased age, diabetes, high dietary salt and fat, family history of high blood pressure, smoking, alcohol, poor food choices, lack of exercise, and genetics all play a role in risk factors associated with this condition. In terms of genetics African Americans are genetically more sensitive to salt (Zilbermint, 2019).

Some experts also think that social and economic factors including discrimination and economic inequality are also responsible. To add to these risk factors is the mistrust that African Americans have of the health care system. A study conducted at the University of South Carolina recorded that perceived racism may also influence the relationship between the provider (Doctor) and the patient. The effects of provider racial biases promote mistrust among the African American population leading to medication noncompliance (Greer, 2014).

Blood pressure readings include two numbers. Systolic which is the top number and the diastolic which is the bottom number. 120/80 or below is considered a normal blood pressure reading. If your systolic blood number is between 121-129 you have elevated blood pressure. 130-139 is considered Stage 1 of high blood pressure. 140 and higher is Stage 2 in high blood pressure. And 180 or above is a hypertensive crisis and you need to call 911 immediately. A hypertensive crisis can cause a stroke and leave a person disabled for life.

Talking with a trusted health care professional is crucial in setting up a plan of action. As mentioned, before the African American community can be faced with bias creating uncomfortable spaces which can have negative effects on health care outcomes. I would highly suggest finding a provider that you are comfortable with and can talk to. Your provider will suggest a combination of treatment options given your individual needs. Some of the approaches that providers recommend are:

- Follow a new food and lifestyle plan which incorporates more fruits and vegetables. Less fat, less salt and limiting alcohol intake. A dietician can help you find ways to meet these goals without giving up your favorite foods.
- Exercise to increase cardio vascular health
- Quit smoking. Tobacco smoke can make blood pressure rise and it can also damage you heart and blood vessels. Talk with your doctor about ways to quit
- Medication. Your doctor may prescribe Blood Pressure medication. Take as directed and do not, I REPEAT, do not suddenly stop taking it. This can cause a rebound hypertension and a hypertensive CRISIS.

High blood pressure is often called the silent killer, because in the beginning stages you will not have any symptoms. It is only in the later stages that you may experience blurred vision, severe headache, anxiety, shortness of breath, nosebleed, feelings of pulsations/pounding in your neck, chest or head, fatigue, confusion, chest pain, irregular heartbeat, and blood in urine. Your blood pressure effects every organ in your body and knowing if you have high blood pressure is detrimental to your health and wellbeing.

In health,

Nurse Nik!

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References

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