

High Blood Pressure: Do You Know Your Numbers?

According to the American Heart Association, nearly half of American adults are living with high blood pressure (also called hypertension), yet many are unaware that they have it. In kids and teens, elevated blood pressure is becoming increasingly common, which may lead to health problems later in life. During May's National High Blood Pressure Education Month, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is working to raise awareness and share the most important tips to prevent or manage high blood pressure.

Knowing your risk factors is the first key preventing and controlling high blood pressure. These include: Age, genetics, and family history of high blood pressure. Risk factors that you can control include: obesity, poor diet, physical inactivity, smoking, and excessive alcohol consumption. There are also medical conditions such diabetes can also increase the risk of developing high blood pressure," she added.

Because there are no obvious symptoms or warning signs for high blood pressure, it's often called a "silent killer." That's why regularly monitoring your blood pressure and understanding your results is another key prevention strategy. A blood pressure measurement includes two numbers: The top number measures systolic pressure, which is the force of the blood against the arteries when the heart beats, and the bottom number measures diastolic pressure, which is when the heart is relaxing between beats. A blood pressure reading of 120/80 is considered normal, while readings above 130/80 mean a diagnosis of high blood pressure.

Knowing your numbers could save your life. "Chronic uncontrolled high blood pressure can damage blood vessels and result in heart attack or stroke, the two leading causes of death in the U.S. High blood pressure may also contribute to kidney disease, vision problems, and peripheral artery disease, but the good news is that high blood pressure can be controlled by taking prescribed medications and following a healthy lifestyle.

Following The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, or "DASH" dietary pattern, is one of the best ways to prevent or treat high blood pressure. This healthy approach includes eating plenty of fruits and vegetables plus whole grains, nuts, fish, lean meat and low-fat dairy products, while limiting added sugars and saturated fats. Sodium intake should not exceed 1500 mg per day, so it's important to check the sodium content listed on the nutrition facts label for any packaged foods. Other key prevention strategies include maintaining a healthy weight, exercising for at least 30 minutes a day, and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. Finally, be sure to talk with your doctor if you have any health concerns or challenges. Healthy blood pressure is a target within reach.

Parker County Extension will be hosting a lunch and learn series, "Do Well Be Well with Hypertension beginning Friday, June 7 and meeting July 21, July 5, July 19 and August 2. The series will be from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. at the Parker County Extension Office. The total cost to attend the entire series is \$15.00 and includes lunch each week. For more information and to register for the series call 817-598-6168.