

[IMAGE]

Watch Your Blood Pressure

By Julie T. Chen, MD

High blood pressure (a.k.a. hypertension) is something that is so common nowadays that I see it on most of my patients' lists of health concerns. Why is this more prevalent these days compared to before?

There are multiple factors that I think contribute to this. First, our society is much more stressful these days...between traffic jams, long work days, too many chores and not enough hours, who can blame us for feeling more stressed these days. But stress doesn't do our body good. The chemicals released with chronic stress in our body worsen the pliability of our vessels and increases inflammation in our body.

Lack of exercise and inattention to the need for relaxation and sleep also can heavily contribute to high blood pressure. The final straw on the camel's back is that along with a busy schedule frequently comes an unhealthy diet that is fat laden or lacking in fiber and vitamins or nutrients. With all of these factors, no wonder we see a rise in more and more people with hypertension.

So, why do we care about having high blood pressure?

Hypertension is concerning for vascular disease especially in the form of heart disease and strokes. Above and beyond that, the factors that lead someone to develop hypertension likely puts them at higher risk for developing other diseases like autoimmune diseases or cancers, just to name a few not so great impacts of an unhealthy lifestyle.

So, what can we do?

There are three basic principles of healthy living that will get you a lot of bang for the buck in regards to your health:

1. Make time to sleep: our time asleep is when our body is most efficient at healing. If you are not resting or sleeping, you are not healing...and let's face it, our days are so action-packed with stress in modern society that we definitely need healing time to undo the damages of our chaotic busy days.
2. Our body needs exercise and movement: exercise or at least making sure you move your body regularly throughout any given day is essential for helping our body function optimally. For example,

people who are sedentary have a harder time with constipation because even walking around helps your intestines to move. Your blood vessels, organs, and even hormone levels are much better regulated if you exercise regularly...not to mention how much the endorphins help you deal with stress better.

3. Eat clean: I have said this time and time again to both my readers and my patients...our body is a machine that requires healthy fuel to heal and function at its peak performance level. So if you eat processed junk foods, your body will function as though it is being fed junk fuel. If you want your body to function optimally and have your blood pressure and other health issues improve, you need to start treating your body with respect and feed it premium fuel like vegetables, whole unprocessed grains, fruits, nuts, legumes, and plenty of water.

I have had many patients who have done well in lowering their blood pressure simply by making these three changes...eating well which inevitably led to weight loss, making time for daily activity or exercise, and making time to sleep at least 7-8 hours a night.

As always though, I recommend that you do all this while being monitored by your physician and I always encourage all of my patients to buy a blood pressure cuff to keep at home so that you become well-versed in what your blood pressure readings are when you're relaxed or stressed on a daily basis. In keeping a blood pressure log like that, you can provide your doctor with accurate blood pressure information for him or her to best assist you in the decisions of reshaping your life, your body and health.

Dr. Julie T. Chen is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit www.makinghealthyez.com.

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