



Patient Education:

CARING FOR YOUR CHILD WITH HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION)

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Hypertension in children is blood pressure that's the same as or higher than 95% of children of the same sex, age, and height.

Some children get hypertension for the same reasons as adults: being overweight, eating a poor diet, and not exercising. Children younger than 10 usually have secondary hypertension.



Many children have no symptoms. Some children may have chest pain, fatigue, headaches, and trouble concentrating and sleeping. Underlying diseases can also cause symptoms.



Your health care provider uses an average of at least three separate pressure measurements for diagnosis. Your health care provider must also check for other medical conditions.



What Is Hypertension?

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against artery walls. Hypertension is blood pressure that's the same as or higher than 95% of children of the same sex, age, and height. What's normal for children changes as they grow, so there's no target blood pressure reading like that for adults. What may be high for a 4-year-old boy may be normal for a 10-year-old girl. Hypertension is either primary (essential, meaning occurring on its own) or secondary (caused by another medical condition).

What Causes Hypertension?

Causes differ according to a child's age. Children younger than 10 usually have secondary hypertension. Diabetes, adrenal disorders, and hyperthyroidism can cause it. Hypertension in babies can result from prematurity or problems with kidneys, lungs, heart, and blood vessels. Some children get hypertension for the same reasons as adults: being overweight, eating a poor diet (such as too much salt), and not getting enough exercise. Older children and teens usually have primary hypertension.

What Are the Symptoms of Hypertension?

Many children have no symptoms, but symptoms of secondary hypertension usually point to the underlying disease. Some children may have chest pain, fatigue, headaches, and trouble concentrating and sleeping.

How Is Hypertension Diagnosed?

Blood pressure readings can vary greatly, so an average of at least three separate measurements is used for diagnosis. The measured pressure is compared with values that are normal for children of the same sex, age, and height. Pressure in both arms and legs should be measured. Cuff size also affects measurement. Before diagnosis, other causes of high blood pressure such as pain, being nervous at the doctor's office, and drugs must be ruled out. Regular health care provider checkups, starting when children are 3 years old, are important for screening. The health care provider must check out medical conditions causing secondary hypertension.



Therapy aims to reduce blood pressure and thus risks of later organ damage. Treatments can include lifestyle changes and drugs. Controlling other conditions such as diabetes is very important.



A heart-healthy, low-fat diet is critical: lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole-wheat breads and pasta. No salty snacks!

Encourage a normal body weight and regular physical activity. Involve the whole family in healthy lifestyle changes.



Don't let your child smoke!



How Is Hypertension Treated?

Therapy aims to reduce blood pressure and thereby risks of organ damage and problems later in life. These problems include stroke, heart attack, and kidney disease. Treatments include lifestyle changes such as losing weight, eating more vegetables and fruits, increasing physical activity, and reducing dietary salt (sodium). Children should never start smoking or should stop. If these changes don't work, drugs can be tried. Control of other medical conditions such as diabetes is essential.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Hypertension:

- ✓ **DO** provide a heart-healthy diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, whole-wheat breads and pasta, and low-fat foods. For example, breakfasts high in fiber and low in sugary cereals are best.
- ✓ **DO** encourage a normal body weight.
- ✓ **DO** have your child participate in regular exercise and aerobic physical activity such as brisk walking. Most children need at least 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Limit TV and computer time.
- ✓ **DO** give your child medicine as prescribed.
- ✓ **DO** involve the whole family in healthy lifestyle changes.
- ⊗ **DON'T** let your child smoke.
- ⊗ **DON'T** give your child salty snacks, such as chips or pretzels. Pay attention to salt used in cooking and in canned and processed foods. Take the saltshaker off the table.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- The National Institutes of Health
Tel: (301) 496-4000
Website: <http://www.nih.gov>
- The American Academy of Pediatrics
Tel: (847) 434-4000
Website: <http://www.aap.org>
- American Heart Association
Tel: (800) 242-8721
Website: <http://www.americanheart.org>
- American College of Cardiology
Tel: (800) 253-4636
Website: <http://www.acc.org>

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