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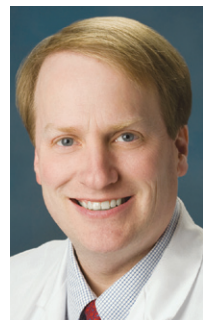


Here's how high blood pressure can lead to heart disease.

by **KenMcEntee**
Contributing Writer

High blood pressure is sometimes called “the silent killer.” That’s because half of the 75 million people in the U.S. who have high blood pressure don’t realize it, says Michael Deucher, MD, a board-certified cardiologist on the Medical Staff at Southwest General.

“Many people who have high blood pressure feel fine,” Dr. Deucher explains. “Some people have blood pressure of 150/90 for 20 years and never know it because they don’t experience any major symptoms. But in the background, high blood pressure may be leading up to heart disease, a stroke or kidney or eye problems.”



Michael Deucher, MD

The good news, he says, is that in many cases, high blood pressure (also called hypertension) can be prevented or controlled with a non-medicinal approach that includes proper diet and sufficient exercise.

Blood pressure, Dr. Deucher explains, refers to the pressure under which your blood is traveling through your arteries. Blood pressure is measured with two numbers:

- **Systole**, which refers to the pressure in

your arteries as your heart squeezes blood through them—about 120 is considered normal.

- **Diastole**, which is the pressure in your arteries while your heart is relaxed—normal is considered to be about 80.

Pre-hypertension is a condition in which the top (systolic) number is between 120 and 140, and the bottom (diastolic) number is between 80 and 90, Dr. Deucher says. High blood pressure is when the top number is above 140 or the bottom number is above 90.

“People often ask me what number is more important, the higher or lower number,” Dr. Deucher says. “The answer is both. Some people may have isolated systolic hypertension where just the top number is high. Maybe their blood pressure is 160 over 80, or 180 over 70. Other people might have isolated diastolic hypertension, like 110 over 90 or 120 over 100. Both numbers should be taken seriously.”

Your blood vessels feed every organ in your body, so when your circulatory system is impacted by high blood pressure, all of your organs feel the effects, he says.

But high blood pressure has particular links to heart disease.

Dr. Deucher says high blood pressure adversely affects the heart in three main ways:

- It can contribute to hardening of the arteries, or arteriosclerosis, which can lead to blockages and heart attacks.
- It can contribute to congestive heart

failure, a condition where fluid builds up around the heart.

- It can contribute to heart arrhythmia, a condition in which the heart beats too fast, too slow or with an irregular rhythm.

“Many people don’t have symptoms of high blood pressure until it gets to the stage where it begins to affect the heart or other organs,” Dr. Deucher cautions. “That’s why it is so important to see your family physician at least once a year for a checkup.”

Blood pressure is measured with two numbers ...

If you have hypertension, he suggests periodically checking your own blood pressure at home. You can buy a blood pressure monitor at your local drug store for \$60 or less.

“If you go to the doctor once or twice a year, you might get caught on a good day or a bad day,” Dr. Deucher says. “You can get a better handle on it by taking your own blood pressure four or five times a month.”

Although hypertension is usually hereditary, eating properly and exercising regularly can lower your blood pressure.

“Obesity has a direct correlation to high blood pressure,” Dr. Deucher says. “Also, it’s important to watch your intake of salt. It’s in everything we eat. The rule of thumb

is to try to eat less than two grams of sodium per day. Learn to read labels—sodium content and other nutritional information are printed on food packaging and is available at restaurants.”

Among the biggest culprits for sodium overload, he says, are salty snacks, fast food, frozen meals and canned soup.

“I refer my patients to the DASH diet, which stands for Dietary Approach for Stopping Hypertension,” Dr. Deucher says. “It is a common sense diet based on proper portion sizes and increased intake of fruits, vegetables and fibers. Following the DASH diet can noticeably lower your blood pressure.”

Michael Deucher, MD, is a board-certified cardiologist on the Medical Staff at Southwest General. Dr. Deucher specializes in preventive cardiology and treats adult patients with known or suspected heart disease. For health information or physician referral, call Southwest General’s Health Connection at 440-816-5050.

Don’t ignore your heart!

If you think that you or a loved one may be having a heart attack or stroke, call 9-1-1 immediately. For any other cardiac-related questions, call 1-877-SWG-BEAT (794-2328), Southwest General’s **FREE** 24-hour phone line, answered by a critical care nurse.