Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

As your heart beats, it forces blood through your arteries. This force is your blood pressure. If the pressure is too high, it is called hypertension (HTN) or high blood pressure. HTN is dangerous because you may have it and not know it. High blood pressure may mean that your heart has to work harder to pump blood. Your arteries may be narrow or stiff. The extra work puts you at risk for heart disease, stroke, and other problems.

Blood pressure consists of two numbers, a higher number over a lower, 110/72, for example. It is stated as "110 over 72." The ideal is below 120 for the top number (*systolic*) and under 80 for the bottom (*diastolic*).

You should pay close attention to your blood pressure if you have certain conditions such as:

- Heart failure
- Prior heart attack
- Diabetes
- Chronic kidney disease
- Prior stroke
- Multiple risk factors for heart disease.

To see if you have HTN, your blood pressure should be measured while you are seated with your arm held at the level of the heart. It should be measured at least twice. A one-time elevated blood pressure reading (especially in the Emergency Department) does not mean that you need treatment. There may be conditions in which the blood pressure is different between your right and left arms. It is important to see your caregiver soon for a recheck.

Most people have *essential hypertension* which means that there is not a specific cause. This type of high blood pressure may be lowered by changing lifestyle factors such as:

- Stress
- Smoking
- Lack of exercise
- Excessive weight
- Drug/tobacco/alcohol use
- Eating less salt

Most people do not have symptoms from high blood pressure until it has caused damage to the body. Effective treatment can often prevent, delay or reduce that damage.

TREATMENT:

Treatment for high blood pressure, when a cause has been identified, is directed at the cause. There are a large number of medications to treat HTN. These fall into several categories, and your caregiver will help you select the medicines that are best for you. Medications may have side effects. You should review side effects with your caregiver.

If your blood pressure stays high after you have made lifestyle changes or started on medicines,

- Your medication(s) may need to be changed.
- Other problems may need to be addressed.
- Be certain you understand your prescriptions, and know how and when to take your medicine.
- Be sure to follow up with your caregiver within the time frame advised (usually within two weeks) to have your blood pressure rechecked and to review your medications.
- If you are taking more than one medicine to lower your blood pressure, make sure you know how and at what times they should be taken. Taking two medicines at the same time can result in blood pressure that is too low.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- A severe headache, blurred or changing vision, or confusion.

- Unusual weakness or numbness, or a faint feeling.
- Severe chest or abdominal pain, vomiting, or breathing problems.

It is your responsibility to follow up with your caregiver in order to determine if your elevated blood pressure should be treated.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 05/31/2007 Document Re-Released: 03/16/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.