

Consequences Of High Blood Pressure

Among people who have high blood pressure, thirty percent don't even know about it! And that's bad news, because untreated hypertension causes thousands of deaths each year. As many as 65 million Americans over the age of six have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension. So what are the consequences of this epidemic? A stroke, which affects the arteries leading to the brain, is one of hypertension's most serious consequences. Strokes are caused by a clot obstructing the flow of blood to the brain, or by a vessel rupturing with the same result. Al Capone is best known for his life of crime in prohibition America, where he was heralded as the boss of the criminal organization in Chicago. What many people don't know about Capone however, is that he suffered a stroke while in prison, which led to his demise at the age of 48. People with hypertension are eight times more likely to suffer from strokes like Capone's than people with normal blood pressure. In fact, high blood pressure is identified as the number one risk factor for strokes. People with hypertension are also twice as likely to suffer from heart attacks. A heart attack occurs when the flow of oxygen-carrying blood to the heart is blocked. Like strokes, heart attacks can result in death. High blood pressure is also the number one risk factor for developing congestive heart failure. This serious condition occurs when the heart is unable to pump enough blood to supply the body's needs. In addition, people with untreated hypertension often suffer kidney damage or even kidney failure. The kidneys act as filters to rid the body of waste. Over time, high blood pressure can narrow and thicken the blood vessels of the kidneys, making it difficult for them to do their job and resulting in waste build up in the blood. High blood pressure can also affect the arteries and smaller arterioles throughout the body. As we age, our arteries harden and become less elastic. While this occurs gradually in all people, those with hypertension experience a speeding up of the process, causing the heart and kidneys to work harder. Even the eyes are not immune to the effects of hypertension! Long-term high blood pressure can eventually cause vessels in the eyes to burst or bleed. As a result, vision can become blurred or otherwise impaired. In some cases, total blindness can occur. These consequences are frightening, but the good news is that they are avoidable. Clinical trials have found that lowering blood pressure to acceptable levels can reduce the risk of stroke by 35 percent, the likelihood of heart attack by 25 percent and the occurrence of heart failure by 50 percent! If you have hypertension, or think you may be a candidate for developing the condition, please talk to your doctor about treatment options.