

to your

# Health!

*"Promoting Good Health Through Information"*

Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System • Patient Education Newsletter • Fall 2003

## New Blood Pressure Guidelines

By: Rosemary Gill, RN, MS



Are you one of the 50 million Americans with high blood pressure? Thirty percent of people with high blood pressure don't even know they have it! Could you be one of these? Do you have high blood pressure that's not as well controlled as it should be? Do

you know what you can do to lower your risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney damage?

Recently, a distinguished panel of national experts came out with new recommendations for health care providers to manage hypertension (high blood pressure). Several important changes in these new guidelines were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in May (JAMA. 2003;289:2459). Many new research studies have shown more information about the dangers of high blood pressure and what works best to control it.

Blood pressures that we used to think were in the normal range, we now know can put people at increased risk for serious problems. Because of this, the new recommendations describe a new category, called "prehypertension". Prehypertension indicates a blood pressure of 120-129/80-89. "Normal" blood pressure is now considered below 120/80. The usual recommendation for treating

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Visit our new patient education website at <http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/patienteducation/patienteducation.htm>

## Recipe for Health CANDIED YAMS

*From the DASH diet*

*A small amount of margarine and orange juice give these yams lots of flavor but little fat.*

3 medium yams (1 1/2 cups)	1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
1/4 cup brown sugar, packed	1/4 tsp ground nutmeg
1 tsp flour, sifted	1/4 tsp orange peel
1/4 tsp salt	1 tsp soft tub margarine
	1/2 cup orange juice

1. Cut yams in half and boil until tender but firm (about 20 minutes).
2. When cool enough to handle, peel and slice into 1/4-inch thickness.
3. Combine sugar, flour, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and grated orange peel.
4. Place half of the sliced yams in a medium-sized casserole dish.
5. Sprinkle with spiced sugar mixture.
6. Dot with half the amount of margarine.
7. Add a second layer of yams, using the rest of the ingredients in the same order as above. Add orange juice.
8. Bake uncovered in oven preheated to 350° F for 20 minutes.

Makes 6 servings – Serving size: 1/4 cup

Calories: 110  
 Fat: less than 1 g  
 Saturated fat: less than 1 g  
 Cholesterol: 0 mg  
 Sodium: 115 mg

*From the DASH Eating Plan*

# Healthy Heart I.Q.

## True or False

1. A blood pressure greater than or equal to 140/90 mm Hg is generally considered to be high.
2. Smoking is a major risk factor for four of the five leading causes of death including heart attack, stroke, cancer, and lung diseases such as emphysema and bronchitis.
3. Lowering blood cholesterol levels can help people who have already had a heart attack.
4. Heart disease is the leading killer of men and women in the United States.
5. High blood pressure affects the same number of blacks as it does whites.

## Answers

**1. TRUE:** “Normal” blood pressure is now considered to be below 120/80. If the diastolic pressure, the second or lower number, is between 80-89, a person is at an increased risk for heart disease or stroke and should have his/her blood pressure checked at least once a year by a health professional. The higher your blood pressure, the greater your risk of developing heart disease or stroke. Controlling high blood pressure reduces your risk.

**2. TRUE:** Heavy smokers are 2 to 4 times more likely to have a heart attack than nonsmokers, and the heart attack death rate among all smokers is 70 percent greater than that of nonsmokers. Older male smokers are also nearly twice as likely to die from stroke than older men who do not smoke, and these odds are nearly as high for older female smokers. Further, the risk of dying from lung cancer is 22 times higher for male smokers than male nonsmokers and 12 times higher for female smokers than female nonsmokers. Finally, 80 percent of all deaths from

emphysema and bronchitis are directly due to smoking.

**3. TRUE:** People who have had one heart attack are at much higher risk for a second attack. Reducing blood cholesterol levels can greatly slow down (and, in some people, even reverse) the buildup of cholesterol and fat in the walls of the arteries and significantly reduce the chances of a second heart attack.

**4. TRUE:** Coronary heart disease is the #1 killer in the United States. Approximately 489,000 Americans died of coronary heart disease in 1990, and approximately half of the deaths were women.

**5. FALSE:** High blood pressure is more common in blacks than whites. It affects 29 out of every 100 black adults compared to 26 out of every 100 white adults. Also, with aging, high blood pressure is generally more severe among blacks than among whites, and therefore causes more strokes, heart disease, and kidney failure.

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## Blood Pressure

prehypertension is lifestyle changes. This means losing weight if you need to, eating a low salt diet, limiting alcohol intake to no more than 2 drinks a day for men (1 for women), and getting regular aerobic exercise most days of the week.

One of the best tools for adopting healthy eating habits to lower your blood pressure is the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan. In some people, this diet has been shown to have results similar to medications that lower blood pressure. Learn more about the DASH eating plan on the Internet at: [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/prevent/h\\_eating/h\\_eating.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/prevent/h_eating/h_eating.htm).

The recommendations for starting medications have stayed the same. The new guidelines still recommend using medications when blood pressure is 140/90 or greater. For people with certain health conditions such as diabetes or kidney disease, the goal is to lower the blood pressure to less than

130/80. The report also points out that for many individuals, it may take at least two medications as well as lifestyle changes to meet the blood pressure goal. Taking medication and making lifestyle changes may seem hard, but the payoff is worth it. Research studies have shown that controlling blood pressure can reduce the rate of stroke by 35-40%, heart attack by 20-25% and heart failure by more than 50%.

So, what does all of this mean for you? Start controlling your blood pressure by making sure you have the information you need. Know what your blood pressure is. Ask your provider what your personal blood pressure goal should be. Make the lifestyle changes you can (see box). Every change counts and can help lower your blood pressure. If you need medication, make sure you take it as prescribed. If it has unpleasant side effects, talk to your provider. There are many blood pressure medicines available. Remember, high blood pressure cannot be cured, but it can and should be, controlled.

# Breast Cancer . . .

## Not just affecting the women we love, but the men too.

By: Julie M. Lee, Pharm.D.



Most of us think of breast cancer as a disease of women only, but in fact, men can suffer from breast cancer as well. It is estimated that over 200,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and almost 40,000 women will die from the disease this year. About 1,300 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer and 400 men will die. Although women are definitely at higher risk, these figures should make men take a closer look at breast cancer.

Breast cancer is a tumor that starts from the cells of the breast. Although the exact cause of breast cancer is still a mystery, we do know that certain things can put you at higher risk. Simply being a woman is the biggest risk factor. Other risk factors are increasing age, family history, ethnicity, genetics, and irregular menstrual cycles. Lifestyle factors, such as taking birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy, extra weight, and alcohol can also put you at risk for breast cancer. Keep in mind that having these risk factors does not necessarily mean you will get breast cancer.

Early detection is key in the fight against breast cancer. There are some common signs to look out for, such as a lump or mass in the breast. Most of the time, the lump is painless and hard with uneven edges. However, this is not always the case. Some lumps can be soft, tender, and round. Other signs to look for are swelling, skin irritation or redness, nipple

pain or discharge, and lumps in the underarm area. If you notice anything unusual, it's important to get it checked out by your provider.

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and this year, National Mammography Day will be celebrated on October 17th. Here at the VA, women should receive mammogram screenings every 12 to 33 months. The American Cancer Society recommends that women perform breast self-exams monthly and have clinical breast exams by their providers every 3 years. Currently, there are no recommendations for scheduled mammograms for men. Now is a good time to encourage the women in your life to get yearly mammograms. If they have already been checked for the year, reinforce the importance of the mammogram and congratulate them for remembering.

Remember, regular exercise, a healthy diet, and limited alcohol can lower your risk for breast cancer. Don't forget your monthly breast self-exams, even for the men. The more comfortable you get with your breast, the more likely you will be able to detect if something is different. And let your provider know if you find something unusual, just in case.

For more information on breast cancer, visit the American Cancer Society website at <http://www.cancer.org/>.



## Getting Started with DASH



*It's easy to adopt the DASH eating plan. Here are some ways to get started:*

Change gradually.

If you now eat one or two vegetables a day, add a serving at lunch and another at dinner.

If you don't eat fruit now or have only juice at breakfast, add a serving to your meals or have it as a snack.

Use only half the butter, margarine, or salad dressing you do now.

Try lowfat or fat free condiments, such as fat free salad dressings.

Gradually increase dairy products to three servings per day. For example, drink milk with lunch or dinner, instead of soda, alcohol, or sugar-sweetened tea. Choose lowfat (1 percent) or fat free (skim) dairy products to reduce total fat intake.

Treat meat as one part of the whole meal, instead of the focus.

Buy less meat. If it's not there, you won't eat it.

Limit meat to 6 ounces a day (two servings) – all that's needed. Three to four ounces is about the size of a deck of cards.

If you now eat large portions of meat, cut them back gradually—by a half or a third at each meal.

Include two or more vegetarian-style (meatless) meals each week.

Increase servings of vegetables, rice, pasta, and dry beans in meals. Try casseroles and pasta, and stir-fry dishes, having less meat and more vegetables, grains, and dry beans.

Use fruits or lowfat foods as desserts and snacks.

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Palo Alto, CA 94304  
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### VA LIVERMORE DIVISION

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Livermore, CA 94550  
(925) 477-2560

### VA MENLO PARK DIVISION

795 Willow Road  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
(650) 493-5000

### VA CAPITOLA OPC

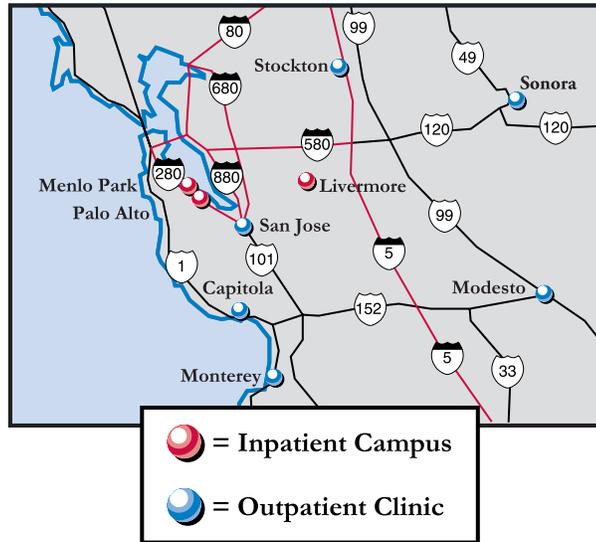
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Suite 102  
Capitola, CA 95010  
(831) 464-5519

### VA MODESTO OPC

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Suite 315  
Modesto, CA 95350  
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### VA MONTEREY OPC

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Seaside, CA 93955  
(831) 883-3800



### VA SAN JOSE OPC

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San Jose, CA 95119  
(408) 363-3011

### VA SONORA OPC

19747 Greenley Road  
Sonora, CA 95370  
(209) 588-2600

### VA STOCKTON OPC

500 W. Hospital Road  
Stockton, CA 95231  
(209) 946-3400

### World Wide Web Address:

[www.palo-alto.med.va.gov](http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov)



## Hepatitis C Support Group

at VA Palo Alto, Menlo Park,  
or Monterey, contact  
Barbara Cunningham, RN, at  
650-493-5000, ext 60281

## Prostate Support Group

meets every 3rd Tuesday in the Auditorium,  
Building 101, Palo Alto Division from  
11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. For more information,  
contact **Sheryl Stanger**, Cancer Registry, at  
(925) 477-2560 extension 35481.

### Questions or Comments?

If you have any questions or topics you would like  
addressed in *To Your Health* feel free to contact:

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## Getting Started with DASH!



Fruits and lowfat foods offer great taste and variety. Use fruits  
canned in their own juice. Fresh fruits require little or no prepa-  
ration. Dried fruits are easy to carry with you.

Try these snack ideas: unsalted pretzels or nuts mixed with rai-  
sins; graham crackers; lowfat and fat free yogurt and frozen  
yogurt; plain popcorn with no salt or butter added; and raw  
vegetables.

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