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High Blood Pressure and Sexual Problems

You probably know it's important to keep your blood pressure under control. High blood pressure (also called hypertension) can lead to all sorts of health problems, including coronary heart disease, heart failure, stroke, and kidney failure.

But did you know that high blood pressure can cause problems in your sex life, too?

What is High Blood Pressure and How Can it Affect Sex?

As blood travels through your arteries, it exerts a certain amount of force along the arterial walls. This force is blood pressure. The higher your blood pressure, the more force your blood exerts against these walls.

Over time, high blood pressure can damage the linings of your blood vessels, leading to plaque buildup and atherosclerosis – hardening of the arteries. When this happens, blood has a harder time flowing to essential parts of the body.

Since blood flow to the penis is an important mechanism for erection, many men with high blood pressure develop [erectile dysfunction](#), which means they can't get or keep an erection firm enough for sex.

Men with high blood pressure might have problems with ejaculation and desire, too.

Reduced blood flow to the genitals can also be an issue for women, interfering with desire, arousal, vaginal lubrication, and orgasm.

Anxiety over high blood pressure and its associated health problems can affect with the sex lives of both men and women, especially if it weakens relationships. Couples may have less desire for sex. Or they may not feel sexually satisfied.

Sexual Side Effects of Blood Pressure Medications

Unfortunately, medications used to treat high blood pressure can cause sexual problems themselves. For example, diuretics (water pills) can reduce blood flow to the penis and lower levels of zinc, which a man's body needs to make testosterone. Beta blockers are another type of blood pressure drug that can have sexual side effects.

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If you think your medication is causing sexual problems, don't hesitate to talk to your doctor. It might be possible to adjust your dose or change the drug you take. Don't make any changes without a doctor's guidance, however.

Manage Your Blood Pressure

There are many steps you can take to lower your blood pressure and keep it at a healthy level. Sometimes, all it takes is changing your lifestyle a bit:

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. You might also consider fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, and nuts. Keep red meat, added sugars, and alcohol to a minimum.
- Cut back on salt and sodium. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute recommends no more than one teaspoon of salt each day. Check the sodium content of the foods you eat. Remember, processed foods tend to be high in sodium.
- Keep your weight under control. Being overweight increases your risk for high blood pressure.
- Exercise regularly. Talk to your doctor about a fitness plan that's right for you.
- If you smoke, quit. Avoid secondhand smoke as well.
- Reduce your stress levels. Blood pressure can rise when we're excited or stressed. Find ways to relax and try not to overextend yourself with commitments. Ask your friends and family for help if you need to.

Your doctor can help you with these strategies and suggest others tailored to you. If you need medication, be sure to take it as directed.

Resources

American Heart Association

“Sex and High Blood Pressure”

(Updated: April 23, 2013)

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/WhyBloodPressureMatters/Sex-and-High-Blood-Pressure_UCM_451787_Article.jsp

Mayo Clinic

“High blood pressure and sex: Overcome the challenges”

(December 7, 2012)

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure-and-sex/art-20044209>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

“What Is High Blood Pressure?”

(August 2, 2012)

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/hbp/>