Hypertension

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is hypertension?

Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure. Arteries are muscular and elastic, and they stretch when the heart pumps blood through them. When the heart beats, it pumps blood into arteries and creates pressure in them. There are two numbers recorded when measuring blood pressure. The first (or top) number (**systolic pressure**) measures the pressure in the arteries while the heart is pumping. The second (or bottom) number (**diastolic pressure**) measures the pressure within the arteries while the heart is at rest. Blood pressure may vary depending upon changes in posture and activity, but it should normally be less than 120/80. A blood pressure that consistently stays between 120-139/80-89 is considered prehypertension; and a blood pressure of 140/90 and above is considered hypertension.

How can high blood pressure damage the body?

Uncontrolled high blood pressure adds to the workload of the heart and arteries. It can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure and kidney failure. Hypertension with its complications is one of the leading causes of death in the United States.

What causes high blood pressure?

In most cases, the cause of high blood pressure is unknown. There are however, risk factors that increase the chance that a person will develop high blood pressure.

Risk Factors You Can Change, Treat, or Control	Risk Factors You Can NOT Control
• *Heavy, regular intake of alcohol	• Increasing age (individuals over age 35)
• Obesity	• Family history of high blood pressure
• Diet (especially when high in processed foods or salt)	• Race (African-Americans)
• Stress	
• Lack of exercise	
• Cigarette smoking	

*This means more than one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. A drink is one 12 oz. beer, 4 oz. wine, 1.5 oz. of 80-proof spirits, or 1 oz. of 100-proof spirits.

How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is referred to as the "silent killer." Most people with high blood pressure have no symptoms at all. There are no specific warning signs. The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure measured regularly.

What can I do to reduce high blood pressure?

It takes a team to treat high blood pressure successfully. You and your physician must work together. However, you can do more than anyone else to bring your blood pressure under control and keep it there. You can help yourself if you…..

- Stay within the recommended body weight for your size and age.

- Eat a healthy and well-balanced diet that is low in processed foods, salt, and fat.

- Increase physical activity.

- Limit alcohol to no more than one or two drinks per day.

- Take medication as prescribed by your physician.

- Do not smoke.

- See your physician for regular check-ups.

- Know what your blood pressure should be and work to keep it at that level.

Greenwich Health at Greenwich Hospital conducts regular blood pressure screening programs. Call 203.863.4444 for information about the program schedules.

Reference: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) @www.nhlbi.nih.gov retrieved August 2004

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education