

Tests reveal hidden culprit

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of water and helps to lower blood pressure, she said. "This is a recommended way to start treatment and sometimes may be the only medication needed."

Because a diuretic may reduce the amount of potassium in the body, people, whose diet allows, may be encouraged to drink a glass of orange juice or eat a banana to restore a normal potassium level, she explained. Sometimes a liquid potassium supplement is prescribed.

Ms. Margolis cautioned patients about their medication. "The most important thing people should realize is that when the doctor gives them medicine they should not stop taking it unless he tells them to." She said people generally stop taking medicine when they feel better. "That's when they run into problems," she added.

In addition some people will stop taking a medicine if it has unpleasant side effects, she said. "They don't stop to consider the long range benefits of the medication."

This is why Ms. Margolis checks on patients who come in for prescription refills. If her card file on the patient shows that a month's supply has lasted for two or three months, she asks them whether they have been taking their medicine properly.

She also pointed out a hidden danger found in over the counter medications.

"Some people don't realize that certain antacid medications such as Alka Seltzer are high in sodium content, she said. "Patients with high blood pressure shouldn't be taking them." She encourages patients to read labels or to consult their physicians before taking any over the counter drugs.

INTERNIST DR. BRUCE RELYEA warned that except in cases where high blood pressure has been present over a period of years, "symptoms are apt to be not present." He compared the condition to that of an automobile with excess pressure in the tires.

"It will give you a nice smooth ride, but you won't get adequate mileage."

Dr. Relyea emphasized that the only way to determine whether hypertension is present is to have your blood pressure measured. Although he conceded that some high risk factors such

as smoking, being overweight, or a hereditary disposition contribute to the disease, there is no way to minimize it. "Detection is the main thing," he said. "Anyone who doesn't know what his blood pressure is should have it checked."

For those who are timid about undergoing the screening, Dr. Relyea said, "Having it measured doesn't change anything, just as having the oil in a crank case checked doesn't affect the operation of the car."

Dr. Relyea said that as one grows older regular checkups are wise. Twice a year for senior citizens is recommended.

He noted, however, that in the rare instances where high blood pressure is found in a child, the condition is complicated and can cause more trouble. It could lead to convulsions, he said.



Michele Zarza, a registered nurse, said that volunteer workers do not diagnose high blood pressure during the screening process. Only a physician can do that. "We just advise the patient that his reading is elevated," she said. (Photos by Charlie Kidd)

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