

# Controlling High Blood Pressure: Are You at Risk?

High blood pressure can be found in people of all ages.

However, Dr. Lawrence Fine says that there are three groups of people who tend to have higher levels of high blood pressure than others.

*“By the time people are 60 or older, about 70% of them will have high blood pressure. African Americans tend to have about twice as much high blood pressure as non-Hispanic whites. And then finally, blood pressure is somewhat higher on average in the Southeast.”*

*“Unfortunately, better than 85% of our patients are overweight or obese. How much is that contributing to their disease state? Well, you’re not sure, but you know it’s not good.”*

Dave Baldwin is Executive Director of The Center for High Blood Pressure in Richmond, Virginia.

Dave says the Center started 26 years ago by community leaders who were concerned about the advanced risk of high blood pressure in the Richmond area.

*“So they made it an independent organization. And over the years, have developed the formula of from just hypertension to the other comorbidities of chronic disease.”*

So along with high blood pressure these chronic diseases include diabetes, high cholesterol, and obesity.

The Center for High Blood Pressure is a free clinic, where patient eligibility depends on their level of income.

There are only a few staff members so volunteer medical professionals, like Dr. Evan Sisson, work hard to fill the gap.

*“We take a patient with an existing diagnosis, and under a collaborative practice agreement with the medical director, we manage these patients with chronic disease, patients with hypertension, high cholesterol, and diabetes.”*

Joyce Rainey, is 52-years old, and has been fighting high blood pressure for years.

*“When I went into the emergency room my blood pressure was 170 over 100, and they gave me some medication and they gave me a list of places where you can go. And I chose to come here.”*

The Clinic’s philosophy in treating patients is to identify and break down the barriers that exist between a patient’s current condition, and better health.

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*“Sometimes the barrier is financial, and we find out that that is the reason why their blood pressure is significantly elevated. And so, our goal in this clinic is to help be a coach and mentor people along that process.”*

Whether medical care comes from a private practice, a university medical center, or a free clinic, the basic message is the same, patients must work closely with their doctors.

They may or may not need medication.

*“One of the things that I’ve done in the past is to take people to the grocery store, and go from aisle, to aisle, to aisle, and talk about, “What are the products that you’re selecting? Show me what you usually put in the cart. Have you looked at these items? What does the food label tell you?””*

*“Measuring success? You have to pay attention to the numbers. What we’ve discovered in our control rates in our patients is that it’s beating national averages reported by the CDC. So, the increased patient contact and keeping them compliant to their programs is an effective model.”*

A heart healthy diet is the perfect model for helping to manage blood pressure.

It limits processed foods and is rich in nutrient-dense foods such as whole grain, high fiber foods, lean meats, poultry and fish.

And lowering the amount of salt we take in is extremely important in bringing down high blood pressure.

While it’s vital to reduce adding salt to food, salt already exists in large quantities in processed foods such as canned foods, chips, sugary breakfast cereals and frozen dinners.

It’s important to reduce or eliminate these in your diet.

Many organizations, including The American Heart Association, recommend the DASH diet. DASH, which stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, is based on a diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables, and low-fat or non-fat dairy products.

Studies show that following the DASH diet reduces high blood pressure, which in turn, reduces the risk of stroke and heart disease.

And physical activity done on a regular basis is crucial.

From taking walks, working in the yard, or climbing stairs, to aerobic exercises such as brisk walking, jogging, bicycling, or swimming, exercise plays an important role in lowering blood pressure.

Check with your doctor before beginning any exercise routine.