



Managing High Blood Pressure in Children

Limit Salt

The first step toward reducing your child's blood pressure is to limit the salt in her diet. Giving up the use of table salt and restricting salty foods can reverse mild hypertension, and will help lower more serious blood pressure elevations. Be cautious when shopping for packaged foods because most canned and processed foods contain a great deal of salt, so check labels carefully to make sure the items have little or no salt added.

Diet, Exercise and Medication

The pediatrician may suggest that your child get more exercise. Physical activity seems to help regulate blood pressure, and thus, can reduce mild hypertension. Weight reduction in the obese individual may serve to lower blood pressure; in addition, there are other health benefits from avoidance of excessive weight.

Once the pediatrician knows your child has high blood pressure, he'll want to check it at least every six months to make sure the hypertension is not becoming more severe. If it does become worse, it may be treated with medication as well as diet and exercise. There are many types of medications, which work through different parts of the body. At first the pediatrician may prescribe a diuretic, a medicine that increases urine output of salt (sodium), before trying stronger drugs. Alternatively, or if this doesn't return your child's blood pressure to normal, a drug called an "antihypertensive" will be prescribed. The doctor will initially prescribe a single drug, and then add others only if the blood pressure is difficult to control.

When your child's blood pressure is brought under control with diet or medication, you may be tempted to let her increase her salt intake or stop taking her medicine because the problem seems to be gone. However, this will only bring back the hypertension, so be sure to follow your pediatrician's instructions exactly.

Preventing High Blood Pressure

It's very important to detect hypertension early. For this reason, your child's blood pressure should be measured at least once a year.

Overweight children are more likely to develop hypertension (as well as other health problems). For this reason, watch your child's caloric intake and make sure she gets plenty of exercise.

It's also wise to keep excess salt out of your child's diet, even if she doesn't have high blood pressure. There's no clear evidence that salt causes this problem, but your child doesn't need extra salt, and once she develops a taste for it, she'll have more difficulty decreasing it if she develops blood pressure problems later in life.