

Some Myths To Take Into Account About High Blood Pressure

Algunos mitos sobre la hipertensión arterial para tener en cuenta

I HAVE NERVOUS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Nervous blood pressure does not exist. In most cases, high blood pressure is a genetic disorder; however, many patients believe that high blood pressure is the result of their stress. The harmful part of this reasoning is that patients believe that when they are calm, their blood pressure is low. Here is the mistake, because the disease has a chance to progress and damage the body.

Blood pressure is high in hypertensive patients either when they are nervous or they are calm; the difference is that blood pressure is higher when they are nervous. A good example to understand this concept would be the following: let's imagine that a source of work (a factory) closes down and the ten employees who worked there are under great stress. If high blood pressure were a nervous disorder, the ten employees would develop hypertension. However, that is not the case; the employee who is genetically predisposed to have high blood pressure may develop this disorder; other employees may have ulcer or myocardial infarction, while others can cope with the stressing situation without becoming ill.

Calm or nervous, the hypertensive patient suffers from high blood pressure.

MY BLOOD PRESSURE IS CRAZY

Variations in blood pressure are normal and common: blood pressure fluctuates with each heartbeat and during daily activities. For example, when talking, blood pressure is higher than when relaxed and silent. Similarly, when lying down, blood pressure is lower than when fully active. Blood pressure is not the same when the patient is seated and relaxed as when he/she is seated and chatting, or walking. The same applies with all daily activities. Blood pressure records are different as a result of this fluctuation in different moments of the day, even within minutes from one another.

I CAN TELL WHEN MY BLOOD PRESSURE IS HIGH

High blood pressure typically **does not cause symptoms!** A "headache" may be due to high blood pressure... but also to low blood pressure or to any other reason, such as contraction of the neck muscles.

Epistaxis (nosebleed) is another symptom associated with this disorder. In most cases, it is a venous bleeding (a small vein that bursts) and is not associated with high blood pressure.

Headaches, epistaxis and dizziness are nonspecific symptoms that are generally due to other causes. Patients usually associate high blood pressure with headache, but in most cases the sequence is reversed. A patient has a headache and culturally relates it to high blood pressure, but this apprehension adds to the pain, becoming a stimulus that increases blood pressure. In this scenario, the patient checks his blood pressure, it is high, and goes to an emergency room. The stress caused by this situation further increases blood pressure.

The importance of understanding this mechanism is that the patient can manage his disease, and not the other way round: the disease managing the patient.

Since hypertension is an asymptomatic disorder, the most common way to diagnose it is by routine checkups with a health care professional.

In case of a high blood pressure record, the advice is to sit comfortably and relaxed, take your medication if you missed your dose, and after a few minutes, check your blood pressure again, two or three times. You will notice that blood pressure usually lowers as you relax and feel safe and confident.

I AM ON A SALT-FREE DIET

Unfortunately, that is not the case. In general, patients do not follow a true low-sodium (low salt) diet. One of the mistakes is to believe that by avoiding the salt shaker, you are following a low-sodium diet. In fact, you should know that only 15% of the total salt you take depends on the salt shaker... the remaining 85% comes from processed foods that we buy at the supermarket. Salt is a preservative and a flavor enhancer, therefore all processed foods, including sweets, contain salt. The only way to follow a salt-free diet is by eating vegetables, fruit and meats cooked at home. As a general rule, if processed foods are avoided, small amounts of table salt can be added to the foods cooked at home.



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INFORMATION YOU MAY FIND IN THE WEB

- <http://pipcv.com.ar/nota/17/10-consejos-del-consejo-argentino-de-hipertension-arterial>
- <http://circularafaela.com.ar/dietas-hipertensos.html>
- http://www.nefrologiahp.com.ar/2011/ver_noticia.php?id=36

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