

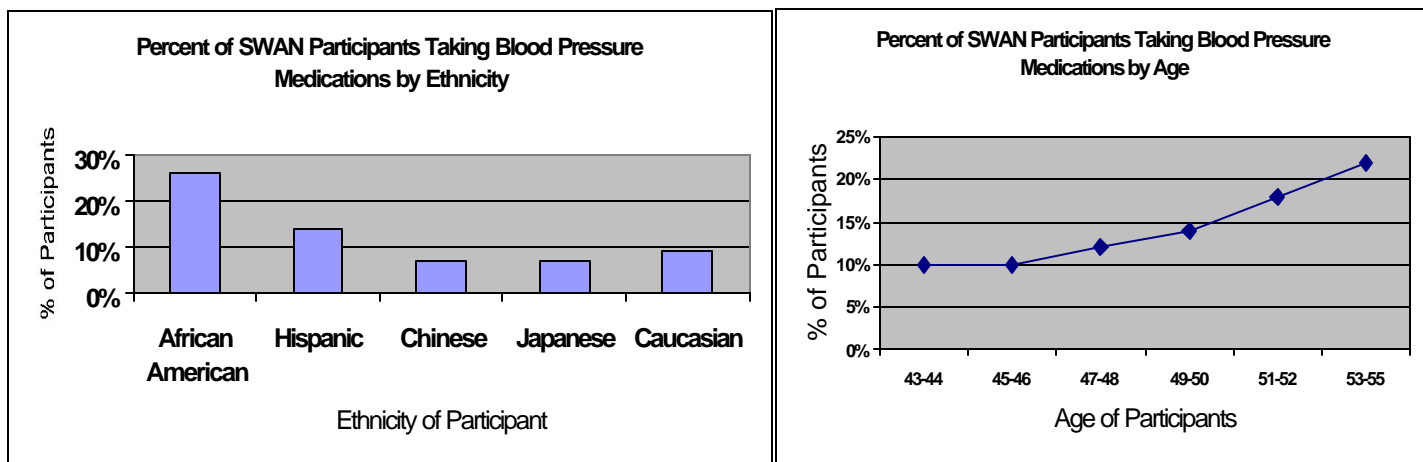
# SWAN UPDATES

September 2000

## **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE**

Currently, as many as 50 million Americans may have High Blood Pressure (**HBP**). As we continue the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN) we have found that some of you are experiencing symptoms and taking medications to control your High Blood Pressure. Here are the results from your third annual SWAN visit.

### **RESULTS FROM THE THIRD ANNUAL SWAN VISIT**



### **What is HBP?**

HBP occurs when the body's smaller blood vessels narrow, which causes the blood to exert excessive pressure against the vessel walls. The heart must work harder to maintain the higher pressure. Your blood pressure reading is a measure of this pressure. When that reading goes above a certain point, it is called high blood pressure. Hypertension is another name for HBP.

Because HBP is so common, everyone should have his or her blood pressure tested at least once a year. Blood pressure readings are given in two numbers. Although the average blood pressure reading for adults is 120/80, a slightly higher or lower reading (for either number) may not be a problem. If blood pressure goes above 140/90, however, some form of treatment diet or drugs may be needed. Lower blood pressure readings (for example, 110/70) are thought to be safe for most people.

### **What are the Symptoms of HBP?**

Hypertension has been called the silent life-threatening condition because it usually produces no symptoms. However, some symptoms may include drowsiness, confusion, headache, nausea, and loss of vision. Hypertensive individuals should call a physician immediately if these symptoms appear.

### **What Causes HBP?**

HBP is referred to as essential or primary hypertension when the doctor is unable to identify a specific cause and when the HBP cannot be cured but can be kept under control by regular, ongoing treatment. Some cases of HBP are caused by other medical conditions, such as pregnancy, cirrhosis, kidney disease, or Cushing's disease. There may also be a causal relationship between HBP and

sleep apnea. This kind of HBP is called secondary hypertension, and it is often controlled once the original medical condition is treated.

Doctors think that many things combine to cause HBP. Being overweight, drinking too much alcohol, smoking, and eating too much salt are risk factors because they raise your risk of having HBP. They do not cause it directly.

Blood pressure goes up in all people during periods of stress or exercise. But avoiding stress will not prevent high blood pressure. You can have HBP even though you are usually a calm, relaxed person.

### **How Is HBP Treated?**

HBP may not make you feel sick, but it is serious and should be treated by a doctor. Recent studies show that you can bring down your blood pressure with changes in diet and daily habits and by taking medicines if necessary. Losing weight, cutting down on salt and alcohol intake, and getting regular exercise, such as walking may be helpful, but only as suggested by your doctor. Do not assume these are substitutes for medicine unless your doctor says they are. If one day's dose of medicine is missed, do not double up the next day. Instead, call your doctor for advice. Medicines should be taken at the same time each day-for example, in the morning or evening after brushing teeth to help set a regular, easy to remember routine.

Some people think that when their blood pressure comes down, they no longer need treatment. If your doctor has prescribed medicine, you may have to take it for the rest of your life. Later on, though, under your doctor's care, you may be able to take less of it.

**Information taken from The National Institute on Aging Information Center**

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