**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HYPERTENSION**

**What is blood pressure?**

Pressure is the physical force exerted on an object by something in contact with the object. During each heartbeat, the heart contracts to pump blood round the body through pipes or tubes called arteries. The force exerted against the wall of the arteries is called blood pressure.

**How are blood pressures expressed?**

The maximum pressure exerted when the heart contracts is called systolic blood pressure. The heart relaxes after each contraction and the pressure produced during this period is called diastolic blood pressure.

**What is normal blood pressure?**

Blood pressure values are written with systolic pressure above and diastolic pressure below a line. Normal systolic blood pressure is equal to or less than 120 mmHg while the normal diastolic pressure is equal to or less than 80 mmHg

**What is hypertension?**

A person is said to have hypertension if the systolic blood pressure is equal to or above 140 mmHg or diastolic blood pressure is equal to or above 90 mmHg or both. This is because people with blood pressure at these levels and above are predisposed to complications.

**What is the burden of hypertension in Nigeria?**

About one of every three adults in Nigeria has hypertension. Unfortunately, almost half of the people with hypertension are not aware of having the condition.

**What causes hypertension?**

In the majority of people with hypertension, the cause is genetic. Genes are the building blocks of the body. This means that hypertension can inherited from parents.

**Apart from genes are there other factors contributing to the development of hypertension?**

Yes. These factors include aging, family history of hypertension, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, excess salt intake, cigarette smoking and excess alcohol. These factors may lead to hypertension on their won or hasten the onset of hypertension in those who are genetically predisposed.

**Are there wrong beliefs or perceptions about the cause of hypertension?**

Yes. Many people believe that hypertension is caused by stress or too much worry. Yet, others think that hypertension is caused by witchcraft.

**What are the symptoms of hypertension?**

In most people, hypertension has no symptom. Thus a lot of people only realise that they have hypertension when they present in health care facilities with complications.

**What are the common complications of hypertension?**

The common complications of hypertension include stroke which causes inability to move one side of the body; heart failure which causes difficulty in breathing; and kidney disease which causes facial swelling and reduced quantity of urine.

**Why is hypertension called a silent killer?**

This is because hypertension has no symptoms. Thus, people may have hypertension for a long time without knowing. Yet hypertension quietly and surely causes damages to the body and leads to deadly complications.

**How can one know if one has hypertension?**

Hypertension can easily be diagnosed by measurement of blood pressure in a health care facility or even at home.

**What do we mean by ‘know your number’?**

By know your number, we mean one should know one’s blood pressure values. This is to prevent the deadly complications of hypertension.

**What should one do if one’s blood pressure is high?**

The person should see a doctor for adequate evaluation, counselling and commencement of treatment.

**How can hypertension be treated?**

Hypertension can be treated using medicines. There are over 100 medicines for treatment of hypertension. Most people will require 2 medicines. Each medicine may be a single tablet or two or more medicines combined in one tablet.

**When should the medicine be taken?**

It is most convenient to take medicines for hypertension in the morning or evening. One advantage of taking medicine in the morning is that it can be taken in the evening in case one forgets to take it in the morning.

**How long should the medicine for hypertension be taken?**

Medicines for hypertension is taken for life. This is because hypertension cannot be cured.

**If one continues to take medicine when blood pressure is normal, can one develop low blood pressure?**

When blood pressure becomes normal following intake of medicines, it means this is the type and dose of medicine required to control the hypertension. The blood pressure will go up if one stops taking the medicine.

However, if one develops symptoms such as dizziness especially on standing from sitting or lying position or unusual sweating, one should immediately see one’s doctor or health personnel to determine if the blood pressure is too low.

**Are there side effects of the medicines for hypertension?**

Yes. Every medicine has side effects. There are however no serious side effects of the medicines used in treating hypertension. Secondly, when intolerable side effects occur, there are several alternative medicines that can be used. Therefore, if one develops unusual symptom when taking medicine for hypertension, the person should see a doctor or health personel.

**Apart from medicines what else can help in reducing blood pressure or even preventing hypertension?**

Healthy lifestyle or lifestyle modifications are very effective in reducing blood pressures in those who have hypertension, and in preventing hypertension. Lifestyle modifications include avoiding excess salt intake, obesity and excessive stress; regular exercise such as brisk walk and increased intake of natural fruits and vegetables.

**Are natural alternatives agents effective in treating hypertension?**

Many people believe that natural agents such as garlics, ginger, olive oil, ‘sobo’ drink, ‘moringa’ leaves, bitter leaf and onion are effective as alternative to medicines in treating hypertension? Though these agents may have minimal blood pressure reducing effects, the quantity required to significantly lower blood pressure will be too large to be tolerated.

**Can one know when one’s blood pressure has gone up or down?**

Some people have said that they know when their blood pressures are high or normal. This is usually based on whether they have symptoms such as headache, poor or lack of sleep and restlessness among others. It has been confirmed that these are not true.

**Can prayer cure hypertension?**

Nigeria is one of the leading religious nations. Everything is possible with God. The current knowledge and medicines used to treat hypertension are consequences of prayers, God’s intervention and hard work. People with hypertension are therefore encouraged to pray and take their medicines.

**Can one live long and in good health with hypertension?**

Yes. This is possible if hypertension is detected early and one takes ones medicines regularly and live healthy lifestyle.

**Why is hypertension often called a family of disease?**

This is because some other conditions such as diabetes, obesity and lipid disorders frequently coexist in a person with hypertension. A person with hypertension should also be screened for these conditions.