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HYPERTENSION AND YOUR SEX LIFE

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What impact can my sexual life have on my high BP?

The issue of high blood pressure (BP) and its associated complications is not news to the general public but it is also a key concern that cannot be ignored due to the devastating damages it is causing to individuals and their families. High BP, also known as hypertension, is a medical condition that can have several causes, including lifestyle factors, genetics, and underlying health conditions. Your sexual life can have an impact on your high BP and vice versa, but the extent of this impact can vary depending on several factors.

In general, sexual activity can cause a temporary increase in BP due to the physical exertion involved. This increase is usually brief and not a cause for concern in healthy individuals. However, if you have pre-existing high BP, this temporary increase in BP may be more significant and can potentially cause complications. Sex is an important aspect of life in both men and women and anything that affects the full ability to enjoy and participate in it is not taken lightly in the lives of many. According to WHO, a blood pressure reading between 120/80 mmHg to 90/60 mmHg is assumed to be optimum and healthy for normal function of body organs. A reading above 140/90 mmHg is risky. When blood pressure consistently measures above 140/90 mmHg, it means that the heart is working harder than it should to pump blood throughout the body, which can lead to a variety of health problems over time, such as an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and organ damage.

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Also BP below 90/60 mmHg is termed Hypotensive and may include some symptoms like dizziness, blurred vision, fatigue, confusion etc. hypotension is a state in which BP is not sufficient enough for proper organs and brain function and may result in organ damage.

High BP, heart disease and diabetes may lead to blood vessel damage which in turn affects blood flow around the body. Both vagina and penis depend heavily on constant blood flow during erection and throughout the sexual experience. A damaged or restricted blood vessel may not be able to deliver enough blood to the penis to achieve recommended erections in men and same may also decrease wetness of the vagina hence reducing the woman's preparedness and libido for intercourse. Some BP medications may cause sexual dysfunction in some men hence the need to let your doctor review your medications to help avoid the ones that are not suitable for you. Do not self-medicate. Monitor your BP and report to your doctor or healthcare provider on how the medications are taking effect on your physical wellbeing.

Fatigue, stress, depression and other mood disorders may also be contributing factors to lower interest in sex in both men and women. During our health screening exercises across various communities in Ghana, we identified that many men hardly seek for medical attention unless they experience ill health. This makes men more susceptible to late diagnosis of chronic conditions and this affects their blood vessels. Due to childbirth and other delicate prompts that commit women to regular medical check-ups, high BP, diabetes and other chronic conditions are more likely to be detected and managed in time.

However, sex is a very important and powerful form of exercise. During foreplay and sex, both sexes experience stretching of muscles, tendons, flexion of joints, and hormonal fluctuations. All these may contribute to cardiovascular fitness (J Health Soc Behav, 2016). The sober and relaxed aftermath experience could also enhance sleep which is good for reducing high BP.

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However, there are clinical concerns that sexual activity may lead to acute cardiac events for people with prior history of cardiovascular disease. This is possibly due to transient or temporary rise in BP during sexual intercourse. In the absence of any other medical condition, this temporary increase in BP during sex would pose no problems since it actually behaves in a way similar to exercising the body. However, many people with high BP have other conditions that can lead to an attack when unusual sex positions (e.g. prolong standing during sex) and violent sexual activities are engaged in. When driven by his desire to please a woman, based on the motive of sex alone, a man may go to any extent. He may take in drugs capable of causing harm to his own cardiovascular system. This includes drugs such as Viagra, herbs in alcohol bitters, and other concoctions known to increase one's sexual prowess. These drugs may have serious repercussions for someone with high BP or the risks of developing such. There are reports of men getting stroke, heart attacks or even dying during sexual activity using these medications and concoctions.

Conditions such as heart failure, hole in heart, respiratory dysfunction may lead to an attack or even death when having sex in an unusual manner with an unusual partner in a new environment.

Moderate but regular aerobic exercises, pain management, good diet, proper stress management are vital tools to managing high BP to avoid complications. Reduction in adventurous sexual pursuit with harmful medications and practice of comfortable sexual positions with one's usual intimate partner will further decrease the likelihood of having an attack or complications during sex in individuals with high BP. Also, a partner who knows you would be able to identify quickly when something is going wrong with you. When love and emotions are mixed with sexual desire, one is able to build a lasting relationship with less stressful events. In this way, there would be much reduction in the risk of sex causing any problem to your BP. It would then even become useful in helping control your BP when you do it the right way.

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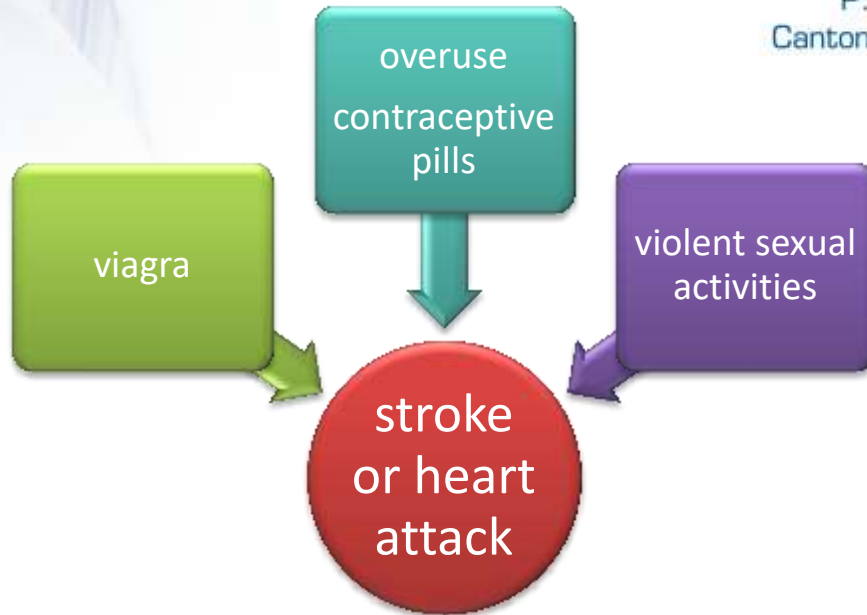
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The following sexual practices could lead to BP crises

Can high BP decrease my sexual satisfaction?

As we have seen earlier, sex itself does not seem to have any obvious threat to your cardiovascular health. However, it has been found that decreased sexual gratification and poor performance could result in men and women having high BP over a long period. This is because high BP damages the lining of blood vessels and cause arteries to harden and become narrower limiting blood flow to the penis or vagina. This makes achieving and maintaining erections difficult – leading to erectile dysfunction in men and vaginal dryness in women. The physical effect is more pronounce in men.

It is not surprising therefore that most men in Ghana with high BP resort to herbal mixtures and Viagra (sildenafil citrate) to be able to have prolonged sex. Men who are on anti-hypertensive but continue to use Viagra and other mixtures for sexual enhancement are in danger of developing dangerous complications of BP.



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This is because some ingredients in Viagra and some of those mixtures can react with some of your anti-hypertensive drugs. Viagra and its related drugs may also lower BP through its actions in moving blood to the penis. Sex also reduces BP after orgasm. Combining these two mechanisms to BP drugs may lower BP beyond healthy expectations. This may lead to shock or stroke or even heart failure during or after sex. We advise that you discuss your sexual concerns with your healthcare provider and not take critical decisions by yourself alone.

Early management or prevention of high BP is the safest way of reducing the likelihood of this decreased satisfaction. Anxiety, depression and other stress-related conditions could worsen this issue of decreased sexual satisfaction.

Regular aerobic exercise, proper stress management and good dieting have also been seen to be of great help in managing sexual dysfunction in men and women with high BP. Vitamins and dispersible aspirin which help to improve blood circulation in the body are also very important to conquering sexual problems. Good dieting habits including salt or sodium reduction, reduction of caffeine products and beverages, reduction of artificial spices, increasing fibre and plant based diets.

It is also important to have an honest and open communication between you and your partner. When sexual partners understand and have patience and respect for each other, they are able to make sex enjoyable and more fulfilling even in the presence of challenging conditions such as high BP and heart disease. Both partners have to be honest and not expect more than they are capable of giving or receiving. They must be committed to each other with the mindset that they complement one another.

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It is very disheartening and heartbreaking when partners leave the relationship to seek for greater sexual satisfaction. This should not be the case if you build trust, love, honesty, understanding, tolerance and patience towards one another. There is more to life and love than sex alone.

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To prevent the ‘silent killer’ from breaking you down is even more important than any sexual satisfaction you can get. And before you forget, you can actually silence the ‘silent killer’ by having a peaceful and romantic sexual life with someone you love and who loves you back.

BP control is a multifaceted issue as we have seen. Aside the mainstream medicine and therapies, there are a host of other important approaches that can contribute to BP control, heart health and general wellbeing of the individual. In some cases, we refer to these approaches as complementary or integrative medicine. Stress and pain management such as medical massage, Shiatsu, osteopathy, psychotherapy, could go a long way to compliment the management of high BP issues.

It is important to consider this aspect of health because majority of health seekers tend to these therapies but sometimes without the proper understanding of what to expect and how to access proper care. At the Icon health Clinic (www.iconhealthsystem.com), we offer a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to finding suitable solutions to high BP, pain, and all other chronic non-communicable conditions.

People on cholesterol lowering drugs such as lovastatin and birth control pills deplete some important vitamins or minerals in their system hence, they need to nourish themselves with multivitamins. However, consult your doctor about the multivitamin you want to take especially if you are on other drugs. From scientific research however, supplements of vitamin E and carotene beta have been found to increase lung cancer in smokers and the risk of death from all causes. Foods rich in beta-carotene and vitamin E are however considered safe and even tend to help lower individual’s risk of cancer and heart disease. It is therefore advised that we consume

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more of these foods rather than relying on their supplements. Please consult your doctor if you are taking vitamin E or beta carotene supplement.

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