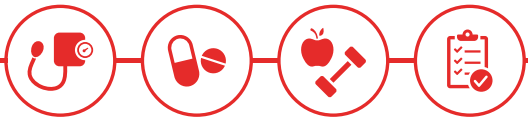
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO MANAGE HYPERTENSION:

A HYPERTENSION COACHING GUIDE



NYC Health

Hypertension is a difficult disease for patients to understand and for patients and providers to manage.

Every patient is different; you can help by choosing and tailoring hypertension control messages and approaches to your patients' individual needs. This coaching guide offers ways to discuss hypertension management and provides strategies to overcome barriers to change.

Sometimes patients may not be immediately receptive to your advice and recommendations. Let your patients know you've heard them by repeating key issues that they've raised. Think in terms of small victories and never give up.

The Steps:
Managing Hypertension

1. Spell Out the Consequences
2. Discuss Lifestyle Modifications
3. Stick with Medication
4. Communicate the Importance of Self-Measured Blood Pressure Readings
5. Empower Social Support
6. Go Beyond the Practice

1 SPELL OUT THE CONSEQUENCES
HYPERTENSION IS SERIOUS

Hypertension is largely asymptomatic, which makes discussing its effects one of the more difficult barriers for health care providers to address.

Patient: "I don't have to worry about my blood pressure because I feel fine."

Describe how high blood pressure affects the body and remind patients that high blood pressure is a silent killer.

- "Blood pressure is the force of blood moving through your blood vessels. The higher it is, the more pressure it puts on the inside of your blood vessels. This extra pressure can also damage your other organs."
- "We often think we need to feel symptoms to know there's a problem, but that's not true. People with high blood pressure usually have no symptoms – that's why high blood pressure is often called the silent killer."

Remind patients of the potential for serious consequences as a result of uncontrolled high blood pressure.

- "If you don't treat and control your high blood pressure, you can face some very serious consequences, including stroke, vision loss, heart attack and heart failure."
- "High blood pressure is the second-leading cause of kidney failure, which can lead to years of dialysis."
- "High blood pressure can damage your blood vessels. The damage may cause impotence and other sexual problems."

Emphasize to patients that you will work together to help manage their condition.

- "I understand you feel fine, but that might change. Here are some ways we can work together to lower your blood pressure."

2 DISCUSS LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS
SHAKE AWAY HIDDEN SODIUM

Making healthy lifestyle changes to lower your blood pressure can be just as important as taking medication. Studies show that a low-sodium diet is an important part of reducing the risk of cardiovascular events.

Patient: "I don't use the salt shaker. How can I lower my sodium intake?"

Address the hidden sources of sodium in common foods.

"I hear you. Many of my patients tell me they don't put salt on their food, but that's not where most of the salt in our diet comes from. Salt is made up of sodium, and sodium is in almost every food we buy – especially packaged, processed and restaurant foods. Let's take a look at this Sodium Flipchart to learn how much sodium is in the food we eat."

"Most of us have too much sodium in our diet, which can be dangerous to our health. Reading food labels can help us know how much sodium is really in our food. Try to eat no more than 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium a day, which is about a teaspoon of salt. Let's take a look at this Food Label Fact Sheet together; it can help you compare the sodium in different products the next time you go shopping. Remember to choose the product with the least amount of sodium."

"Remember that restaurant food can have a lot of hidden sodium. When possible, cook meals at home using less processed foods. Make half your plate fruits and vegetables. Let's take a look at this plate planner, which can help you prepare healthy meals at home."

3 STICK WITH MEDICATION
ADDRESS ADHERENCE AT EVERY VISIT

Many patients are unable to reach their blood pressure goals for a variety of reasons, including medication adherence. Start the conversation by assessing adherence with every patient using the Are You Taking Your Medicine? Questionnaire. Use their answers to respond to their beliefs and concerns about taking medication.


Are You Taking Your Medicine?

Many people have trouble taking their medicine all the time. Fill out this form and give it to your provider or pharmacist. It will help them better understand your health needs.

1. Do you ever forget to take your medicine?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. When you feel better, do you sometimes stop taking your medicine?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. If you feel worse when you take your medicine, do you sometimes stop taking it?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Are there other things that get in the way of taking your medication?
   _____
5. Do you sometimes take your medicine differently from how your provider prescribed? For example, taking less or skipping days?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

Note to Providers: Use the Hypertension Management Guide for additional resources related to medication adherence.

Questions 2–5 are adapted from Mumby SE, Green LW, Levine DM. Concurrent and predictive validity of a self-reported measure of medication adherence. Med Care. 1986 Jan;24(1):67–74.

Patient: "I don't know how to keep track of all my medications. Sometimes I forget to take them and I don't know which is which."

- "Even if you use a pillbox, you should never throw away your medication bottles. Keep the bottles in a safe place and bring them with you to every doctor's appointment. We can then discuss the best way to track your medications."


My Medication List – Keep It Handy

- Write everything you take—prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs and herbal supplements—in the table below.
- Take this list to every doctor's appointment. If you go to the emergency room or hospital, and when you go to the pharmacy.
- Don't run out of your medicine – ask your doctor for a new prescription or get a refill from your pharmacist.

Date _____

Name and Dose of My Medicine	How much do I take?				When do I take it and how much?				I ask someone to take my medicine
	Pills	Liquid	Drops	Other	Morning	Noon	Evening	Bedtime	
Example: Hydrochlorothiazide 25 mg	Example: 1 pill				Example: 1 pill				Example: Mom checks my meds

If you have any problems with your medicine, do not wait. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist right away.

Patient Name _____ Name of Primary Care Provider _____ Name of Pharmacist _____

Phone Number _____ Phone Number _____

nyc

- "Let's use this medication log to help you find the best way to take your medication every day."

- "If you have a smartphone, take a photo of each of your medication containers before you come back to see us so we can talk about what you are taking and what it's for."

- "What is one thing you do every day? Do you think you can try taking your medication when you do that every day?"

Patient: "I feel fine. Why do I need medication?"

- "Your medication helps to control your high blood pressure and can help lower your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Taking this medication now will help your heart so it won't have to work as hard – and that can lower your risk of complications later."

Patient: "I don't want to take medication every day."

- "There are many patients who don't like the idea of taking medication every day. Think of it like wearing a seatbelt. It doesn't take a lot of effort, but it does a lot of good. In fact, it can save your life. You get into a car, and you buckle up. You don't even think about it. That's the way high blood pressure medication can be for you."

Patient: "This medicine makes me feel worse."

- "We can work with you to adjust your medication to help reduce the side effects. Many medications now have fewer side effects than what you may have heard or experienced before."

Patient: “I don’t like chemicals.”

“It sounds like you may be interested in natural ways to control your blood pressure. You can do that by eating healthy and being physically active. But taking medication while also making these healthy changes is really the best choice. Let’s start on your medication and we can discuss the best ways for you to remember to take it.”

“Healthy lifestyle changes can help you feel better and reduce your chance of developing other conditions. If you make these changes, you might be able to stop taking the medication.”

“I understand that you may not like chemicals. You are not alone. But these medicines have been studied and prescribed to patients for many years. Taking a little medicine now may prevent you from having to take more medicine later.”

4 COMMUNICATE THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-MEASURED BLOOD PRESSURE READINGS

SELF-MONITORING IS KEY

Self-measured blood pressure monitoring, or out-of-office monitoring, is a valuable tool in managing hypertension. Empower patients to manage their condition by showing them how to correctly check their blood pressure.

Patient: "I don't need to check my blood pressure at home. You check it when I come to the office."

- "It's important you check your blood pressure in between our visits because many things can cause your blood pressure to go up and down throughout the day. Reviewing your blood pressure readings will give us a picture of your true blood pressure over time. This will help us learn if your treatment plan is working and give us the best information to make changes. Let's take a look at this How to Take Your Blood Pressure Fact Sheet so you can learn to take your blood pressure correctly every time."
- "Knowing your blood pressure numbers is one of the most important things you can do for your health. Using this Blood Pressure Tracking Card can help us better manage your condition. Remember, if after your second reading your blood pressure is still very high (180/110 or greater), please call my office right away or go to the emergency room. Don't wait!"

5 EMPOWER SOCIAL SUPPORT
FOSTER OPEN COMMUNICATION

Social support is a powerful tool in managing hypertension. Urge your patients to reach out to friends and family members to help them achieve their goals. Remember traditional and cultural beliefs play an important role in disease management. Acknowledge these beliefs and work with your patients to integrate into treatments.

Patient: "It's hard for me to juggle going to work, caring for my family, eating healthier and taking my medications."

- "Your missed appointments really concerned us. But I'm glad you're here now. Let's talk about what's been going on since I last saw you."
- "I hear you when you say you're stressed and that's made you sick. We can help you deal with that stress so you can feel better."
- "Can we ask your partner or another family member to come with you to your next appointment?"
- "Why don't you suggest ways you and your partner can both stay healthy? For example, you could ask your partner, 'How about we take walks together after dinner?'"
- "What do you think about this? Is it different or similar to your ideas about how to lower your blood pressure?"

6 GO BEYOND THE PRACTICE
USE THE POWER OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Help patients manage their hypertension by providing community resources to assist them with lifestyle modification and blood pressure management.

Patient: "Are there resources or classes I can take to help me lower my blood pressure?"

- "Churches, community groups and mobile health vans often provide free blood pressure screenings. Let's find out what's available in your area."
- "Many pharmacies offer free blood pressure screenings and the pharmacist can make sure you are taking your blood pressure correctly. The pharmacist can also answer any questions you may have about your medication."
- "There are free nutrition workshops and fitness classes throughout New York City. Let's look online together at NYC's free Shape Up classes to find one that's right for you."
- "Let's see if there are any walking clubs in your area. They're a great way to help keep you active and connected to other community members who are working to stay healthy."
- I understand that sometimes it may be hard to pay for your medication all the time. There are prescription programs available to help with medication costs. Let's look together to see what works best for you.

NYC Health

HPD1X25712 - 10.17