

Do not lower high blood pressure too early with medication - new problems can arise

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When blood pressure is high, many quickly reach for medication. However, physicians warn of new problems that can arise in this way.

- Doctors warn of risks when high blood pressure is lowered too quickly with medication.
- When blood pressure is considered normal and when it is considered too high changes occasionally
- Currently, a blood pressure of 120 to 80 mmHg to 129 to 84 mmHg is considered "normal," and above 140 to 90 mmHg is considered hypertension, or high blood pressure.

Those who are not among those fortunate people with clearly normal blood pressure, but rather slightly above it, have for years been confronted with different and, for laypersons, often confusing announcements. At the heart of the matter is always the question of when blood pressure is considered to be in need of treatment and what value should be aimed for as the goal of drug therapy.

Decades ago, an upper value of 100 plus age was okay (for a 60-year-old, that would correspond to 160 mmHG), but today medical experts draw much lower boundaries. In 2015, the so-called Sprint study even came to the conclusion that it was best to push the upper value to below 120 mmHg. A recommendation that many experts, such as those from the German Heart Foundation, warn against uncritically following, however, because such a strong reduction in blood pressure is not suitable for all patients and can have a negative effect, especially on older people.

High blood pressure: Only above this value do you need medication

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Society of Cardiology and the German Hypertension League, a value slightly below 120 at 80 mmHg is currently considered "optimal"; values of 120 to 129 at 80 to 84 mmHg are considered "normal."
- According to this classification, values of 130 to 139 at 85 to 89 mmHg are still classified as "highly normal" and do not need to be lowered with the help of tablets.
- Accordingly, this is only the case from values of 140 to 90 mmHg, in which case grade one hypertension, a mild form of high blood pressure, is present.
- Moderate hypertension starts from a value of 160 to 100 mmHg, severe hypertension from 180 to 110 mmHG.

Blood pressure: How to deal with values up to 140 over 90?

Experts are particularly divided about how to deal with values in the range of 130 to 140 to 85 to 90 mmHg. Is this still healthy or already sick? Medical experts in the USA have decided in favor of the latter.

Last year, the American College of Cardiology introduced an additional category in its guidelines: "Stage 1 Hypertension." This is particularly significant because American cardiologists already consider this value to be in need of treatment: Patients in whom it is measured repeatedly are therefore prescribed antihypertensive drugs.

The U.S. often leads the way in medicine, and the Europeans follow suit a little later. In the case of the assessment of slightly elevated blood pressure levels, however, this is not on the horizon. At its congress in September 2018, the European Society of Cardiology decided to retain the previous

threshold values. Accordingly, drug treatment is only necessary from a blood pressure of 140 to 90 mmHg.

Treating high blood pressure: Blood pressure drugs can have negative consequences

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A team of scientists from the Technical University of Munich (TUM) and Helmholtz Zentrum München now backs up this decision. The researchers have concluded that such a low threshold for treatment does not provide protection against fatal cardiovascular disease. Rather, taking tablets against high blood pressure can have negative consequences for the psyche of those affected - and even have a negative effect on heart health, i.e. the opposite of what the therapy is actually intended to achieve.

High blood pressure: short nap as good as medication

"The idea behind the U.S. guidelines is to reduce high blood pressure as early as possible and to motivate patients by diagnosing a disease," explains Karl-Heinz Ladwig, a researcher at the Department of Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy at TUM University Hospital rechts der Isar. Together with his team, he analyzed data from nearly 12,000 patients.

"We investigated how high the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease was for people in the various blood pressure categories within a ten-year period and what other risk factors were present in each case," says Seryan Atasoy, an epidemiologist at the Helmholtz Center and Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich and lead author of the study.

Blood pressure: Many sufferers do not change their lifestyle despite diagnosis

The result of the Munich study: In the "Stage 1 Hypertension" category newly created by the American cardiologists, the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease was not significantly higher than with normal blood pressure. Karl-Heinz Ladwig also regards the motivational effect postulated by the U.S. physicians as questionable.

As justification for his doubts, the Munich researcher cites the example of patients with dangerously high blood pressure. Their risk of a fatal cardiovascular event is significantly increased, that is undisputed worldwide - as is the fact that drug treatment is indispensable for such patients. At the same time, however, Ladwig said, smoking and lack of exercise are particularly prevalent among this group; both are among the biggest risk factors in hypertension. "This shows that many do not change their lifestyle despite the diagnosis," the researcher concludes.

Blood pressure: half of patients taking medication had depressed moods

For people with borderline blood pressure between 130 and 139 and 85 to 89 mmHg, a very different risk factor may come into play instead. It has been known for some time that there are manifold interactions between psychological crises, depression and cardiovascular events. The Munich-based scientists themselves had shown in an earlier study that depression places a similar burden on the cardiovascular system as high cholesterol levels and obesity.

And now it gets complicated: As the Munich study found, about half of the men and women who took medication for their high pressure were found to have depressed moods. That was the case in only about one-third of patients who did not seek treatment, he said. "We assume that this is a labeling effect" explains Karl-Heinz Ladwig: "If you are officially labeled 'sick,' it has an effect on your mental health."

According to calculations by the American College of Cardiology, the new guidelines in the U.S. will increase the percentage of adults diagnosed with high blood pressure from 32 to 46 percent. "So 14 percent will be exposed to additional psychological pressure," Ladwig says - "without a significantly higher risk for them to develop a fatal cardiovascular disease and without a motivational effect of the diagnosis." The Munich scientists therefore see it as "fundamentally wrong" if Europeans were to adopt the guidelines from the United States.

Lowering blood pressure levels naturally

The "European Society of Cardiology" recommends lowering blood pressure levels naturally when blood pressure is in the high-normal range. Even if it is difficult and many do not keep it up permanently: Through a change in lifestyle, even people with pronounced high blood pressure can manage without medication or at least significantly reduce their dosage.

According to the German Heart Foundation, blood pressure can be lowered particularly effectively by losing weight, on average by two mmHg per kilogram lost. Three-quarters of all overweight people suffer from high blood pressure.

A reduction in the values of five to ten mmHg can be achieved through regular physical activity, although experts point out that not all types of sport are equally suitable and that any extra exercise in everyday life already brings something. Also less salt, alcohol and a renouncement of smoking are extremely beneficial for the blood pressure. Easy to say, but important to take to heart: stress should be reduced - as a permanent condition, it puts just as much strain on the cardiovascular system as depression.

Nutrition can not only affect blood pressure, but also influence the risk of cancer. According to a new study, cow's milk significantly increases the risk of breast cancer.