

February is American Heart Month

Make Blood Pressure Control Your Goal

This American Heart Month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Million Hearts®, a national public-private initiative of the Department of Health and Human Services, are encouraging Americans to know their blood pressure, and if it's high, to **make control their goal** in order to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes in the United States by 2017.

Uncontrolled high blood pressure is a leading cause of heart disease and stroke. In fact, more than 67 million (31%) of Americans have high blood pressure – that's 1 in every 3 adults. Unfortunately, only about half (47%) of people with high blood pressure have their condition under control. People with high blood pressure are 4 times more likely to die from a stroke and 3 times more likely to die from heart disease, compared to those with normal blood pressure.

High blood pressure usually has no warning signs or symptoms, which is why having your blood pressure checked regularly is important. You can get screened at your doctor's office and drugstores or even check it yourself at home using a home blood pressure monitor. Measuring your blood pressure is quick and painless.

Blood pressure is measured using two numbers. The first number, called **systolic** blood pressure, represents the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats. The second number, called **diastolic** blood pressure, represents the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart rests between beats. A blood pressure less than 120/80 is normal. A blood pressure of 140/90 or more is too high. People with levels from 120/80 to 139/89 have a condition called prehypertension, which means they are at high risk for high blood pressure.

Make Control Your Goal

If you know you have high blood pressure, take these steps to help get it under control:

- **Ask your doctor what your blood pressure should be.** Set a goal to lower your pressure with your doctor and talk about how you can reach your goal. Work with your health care team to make sure you meet that goal. Track your blood pressure over time.
- **Take your blood pressure medicine as directed.** Set a timer on your phone to remember to take your medicine at the same time each day. If you are having trouble taking your medicines on time or paying for your medicines, or if you are having side effects, ask your doctor for help.
- **Reduce sodium intake.** Most Americans consume too much sodium, which can raise blood pressure.
- **Quit smoking! And if you don't smoke, don't start.**



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Patient Testimonials

The Best Christmas Gift Ever...

“A million thanks to the Nurse Navigator and Patient Advocate for being a beacon of positivity and patience during the darkest of days. Although not every case presented to CC3 has such favorable outcomes, the support and clinical information that they provide patients and their families is unparalleled.”

--Jennifer Monty

Shortly before Thanksgiving 2014, my Mom started experiencing symptoms that prompted a visit to her family doctor. At 58 years old and always an incredibly healthy person, she figured that anything out of the ordinary was, in her own words, a product of “getting older.” Her family doctor, who is also a family friend and known her for many years, listened to her explain her symptoms and ran the standard panels of blood work, all of which came back within normal limits. Erring on the conservative side, he also ordered a CT scan to check her liver and kidney functioning. To both her surprise and the surprise of her family doctor, her liver and kidneys looked normal and healthy; however, there was a spot that showed up on her lung that was of some concern. Since the spot was not very large in size and my Mom is a non-smoker, the family doctor and radiologist dismissed the idea that it could be anything of major significance and instructed her to “not worry about it and come back in a year for another CT scan.”

Leaving the doctor’s office my Mom had a nagging feeling that something just wasn’t right. With the recent death of her younger brother to cancer and a family history of various cancers she kept thinking, “What if that spot is something more serious?” As the holidays approached, she tried to continue living life and pushing the CT results to the back of her mind, but her worry manifested into her everyday routine. As I did my own online “research” for her (aka Google & WebMD), the information I found ranged from non-harmful lung nodules to cancer. As with any medical worry, looking at the Google results and the WebMD lists made everything seem like a terminal condition.

On a visit to my parents’ house one weekend I started telling my Mom about ConnectCare3. At the time I didn’t really know much about the CC3 process except for them being the “really friendly women who worked on the third floor in my office” that helped people find doctors and accurate medical information. As a totally self-reliant person and someone who never asks for help with anything, my Mom was hesitant to share her medical information with anyone or ask for help, but she finally consented to let me inquire about CC3 services on her behalf. Contacting CC3 was simple. Within minutes I received communication from the Patient Advocate inviting me to complete some intake paperwork and to explain the process. Assuming the worst, I met with the Patient Advocate to fill out some paperwork and she couldn’t have been any kinder. She listened and made me feel completely at ease. Within that day the Nurse Navigator called my Mom and gave her the name of a pulmonologist in Lancaster. She explained that getting an appointment might be weeks or even months away but to get placed on the cancellation list.

From their initial conversation, the Nurse Navigator encouraged my Mom to let go of some of the worry and maintain a positive outlook, explaining that this gray period of the unknown is always the hardest and not to jump to any self-diagnosis. Luckily enough with the CC3 suggestion of being placed on the cancellation list, my Mom was able to get an appointment with the pulmonologist that very week. From that second opinion appointment, the pulmonologist discovered that the radiologist and family doctor had both overlooked some other items on the initial CT scan. He ordered another scan along with more blood work and ultimately a bronchoscopy.

In the weeks to come my Mom was convinced that all this testing had to indicate a forthcoming cancer diagnosis. However, the Nurse Navigator continued to persevere as my Mom’s advocate in keeping her attitude positive. On December 23rd, my Mom went to her appointment with the pulmonologist to discuss all of the test results. After explaining that the CT scans showed lots of metabolic activity in her lymph nodes and a large spot on her lung, the pulmonologist gave her the best Christmas gift ever with the news that everything was benign and that the metabolic activity was most likely the product of a common infection.

Without the help of CC3, my Mom would probably still be living with the constant worry of wondering and waiting. She also would have never found the pulmonologist, who she cited as the most patient, kind, and thorough doctor she had ever known. A million thanks to the Nurse Navigator and Patient Advocate for being a beacon of positivity and patience during the darkest of days. Although not every case presented to CC3 has such favorable outcomes, the support and clinical information that they provide patients and their families is unparalleled.