



FALMOUTH VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER'S ASSOCIATION
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
SAFETY INITIATIVE

SUBJECT: PERSONAL HEALTH

NUMBER:
SI09-002

APPROVED:

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INITIATED
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This quarter we will look at Health issues:

Statistics show that 45 % of the On-Duty Firefighter deaths each year are caused by heart disease. 74% of the Firefighters with high blood pressure do not have it adequately controlled.

High blood pressure (hypertension) affects more than 73 million Americans, which means 1 out of every 3 adults. High blood pressure use to be thought of as an “old persons” issue but not anymore. People are getting diagnosed and treated younger and younger each year.

Family history plays a big part in the equation. If anyone in your family has hypertension or had it before age 55; if they had a heart attack before age 60; or had a stroke, then you are at an increased risk.

So what numbers are we looking for?

120/80 or LESS is considered normal. 140/90 or greater is hypertension and *you need help!*

Left untreated hypertension can lead to a stroke, heart attack, and damage to the eyes, kidneys and blood vessels.

Some things cannot be changed; your family history; your race; your gender and diabetes. If you do not have hypertension by age 55 then you have a 90% of developing high blood pressure.

So you've been dealt a “bad hand”, what can you do about it? Control your weight. Every 10 pounds of weight gain can raise your BP 5 points. Exercise

can lower you BP and help control your weight. Watch your diet, foods high in fat and salt contribute to weight gain and high BP. Fruits, vegetables, and foods low in fat and sodium can help manage your BP.

If all else fails then there are medications such as ACE Inhibitors, ARB's, Beta-Blockers, Calcium Channel Blockers and Diuretics. If your Physician starts you on medications it is very important to take it *exactly* as prescribed.

How to I know if I have high BP?

Check it regularly. We have all sorts of equipment here at the station to check it. A single high reading *does not* mean you have hypertension. Your Physician will want to see how you are trending. Check your BP every few days; record the date, time, pulse rate and the BP reading. If you are regularly running greater than 12/80, make an appointment and see your Physician.

Another issue that affects us is Cancer. As a Firefighter you are at an increased risk on getting cancer. A University of Cincinnati study found that Firefighters have a 100% risk of developing testicular cancer, a 39% risk for skin cancer, a 32% for brain cancer and a 28% risk for prostate cancer.

What can we do to minimize our risk?

- Wear proper PPE and clean it as necessary. The products of combustion (smoke/soot) are not only inhaled but are also absorbed through the skin. Every time you wear dirty gear you are re-exposing yourself.
- Limit our exposure to diesel exhaust at the station and on the scene.
- Participate in screening programs. Early detection is the best.
- Eliminate the use of tobacco products.