

Health Awareness

Dominoes Explain Effects Of High Blood Pressure

(NAPSA)—Uncontrolled blood pressure can trigger a domino effect of catastrophic health events such as stroke, heart attack, heart failure and kidney disease—but you don't have to let it knock you down.

About 80 million adults, roughly one-third of the U.S. adult population, have it. Most people with high blood pressure have no symptoms and can go for years without a diagnosis. In fact, one out of five people with high blood pressure don't even know they have it.

To help, the American Heart Association (AHA) created a new video showing a line of dominoes that trigger the fall of the heart and brain, indicating how the condition damages those vital organs.

"So many people involved in the treatment of hypertension have seen its ravages," said Willie E. Lawrence, Jr., M.D., chief of cardiology at Research Medical Center in Kansas City, Missouri, and an AHA volunteer. "Many of us have been influenced by its impact on friends and family—whether we know someone who has high blood pressure or has had a heart attack or stroke because of it."

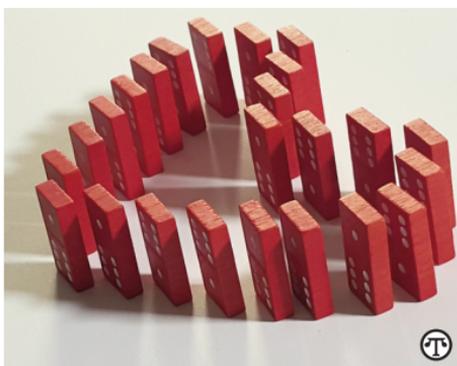
High blood pressure is when blood pumps through your blood vessels with too much force. That can damage blood vessels and "topple" your health.

Blood vessels can be damaged by tears in the muscular wall or by weakening. Tears can lead to clots, which then lead to heart attacks or strokes. Weakening can cause the vessel to burst, as in an aneurysm or brain bleed.

"About half of the people who have high blood pressure don't have it under control," Dr. Lawrence added. "Awareness is simply not enough, and we want to send the message that high blood pressure is serious. We have to be active, and even aggressive, in managing and treating high blood pressure because lives are at stake."

Another domino effect of uncontrolled high blood pressure is that it may triple the risk of heart failure, which affects nearly 6 million Americans. When heart failure occurs, the weakened heart cannot keep up with the body's needs.

Blood vessel damage also affects kidney function, paving the way for kidney disease and the need for dialysis. High blood pressure is the second leading cause of kidney failure. The kidneys and the circulatory system depend on each other for good health. The



Just as dominoes can fall one after another, high blood pressure can lead to other problems, if you don't take care.

AHA and the National Kidney Foundation are working together to prevent risk factors for cardiovascular disease, stroke and kidney disease through early detection, prevention and awareness initiatives.

"The good news for people with this condition is that we know how to manage it," Dr. Lawrence said. "We know that lifestyle changes really work to reduce pressure, and many of the medications to manage it are inexpensive."

How to manage blood pressure:

- **Eat a better diet**, which may include reducing salt.

- **Enjoy regular physical activity.** At least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Even a small weight loss, such as 10 pounds, can reduce blood pressure.

- **Manage stress.** It can cause a temporary increase in blood pressure. If you're working to keep your pressure in a healthy range, avoiding stress can help you maintain your goal.

- **Comply with medication prescriptions.** Healthy eating and physical activity should be part of your plan for lowering blood pressure—even if you're taking medication—but a healthy lifestyle may not eliminate the need for medications.

- **If you drink, limit alcohol.** The AHA recommends that if you drink, limit alcohol to no more than two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women.

"It's important to know that there is no 'safe' level of high blood pressure, even if you feel OK," Lawrence said. "There's a reason we call high blood pressure a silent killer. Don't take life-or-death chances with this disease. Instead, take responsibility and don't let that first domino fall."

Learn More

To view the video and learn more about managing blood pressure, visit www.heart.org/hbp.