

HEALTH

High blood pressure more common among black men

HOUSTON — Regular blood pressure checks can mean the difference between life and death for many men, especially African-American men.

“Young African-American males probably use health care the least of any group and most likely haven’t had their pressure checked in years,” said Dr. Charlene Dewey, assistant professor of medicine at Baylor College

of Medicine. “They come in with ‘target organ damage,’ usually heart or kidney, at an earlier age because they have not been diagnosed or treated.”

As a rule, people with high blood pressure, or hypertension, have no symptoms. If left untreated, it can lead to heart disease, heart attacks, stroke, and kidney or heart failure.

“We call hypertension the

silent killer because a person can have it for years and not know,” Dewey said.

Blood pressure is the force needed to move blood through the body’s vessels. A normal reading is 120/80. The top number is the systolic pressure, taken when the heart contracts. Diastolic pressure, the bottom number, is taken when the heart relaxes. A reading greater than 140/90

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Center to study black medical issues

TUSKEGEE, Ala. (AP) — A new bioethics center focusing on medical issues for minorities is opening in the town where black men with syphilis went untreated for 40 years as part of a notorious government study.

The Tuskegee University National Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care opens on Saturday. Survivors of the Tuskegee experiments, ranging in age from 89 to 109, will be on hand.

“We expect for the first time to be training and

educating significant numbers of African-Americans as bioethicists - something we don’t have now,” said Benjamin Payton, the university president.

The center was helped by a \$200,000 grant President Clinton announced in 1997, when he apologized on behalf of the government for the syphilis study.

In the 1930s, the federal Public Health Service lured black subjects in Tuskegee with the promise of free health care. A total of 399 men were

never told they had syphilis, and researchers carefully monitored how the disease claimed its victims.

By the time the study was exposed by The Associated Press in 1972, 28 men had died of syphilis, 100 others were dead of complications, at least 40 wives had been infected and 19 children had contracted the disease at birth.

Tuskegee University, a historically black college known then as Tuskegee Institute, was not involved in the study.

HEALTH BRIEFS

TAKE MOTION-SICKNESS MEDICATION BEFORE SYMPTOMS DEVELOP

If the motion of the ocean gets to you, make sure your medication gets to you first. “One of the side effects of motion sickness is decreased absorption in the stomach,” said Dr. Wayne J. Riley, director of the Travel Medicine Service at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. “So oral drugs taken after the onset of symptoms are usually not very effective.” Motion sickness can cause vomiting, paleness, cold sweats, hyperventilation and headaches. Some over-the-counter antihistamines can help minimize the discomfort of motion sickness if taken two hours before traveling. Medicated patches containing scopolamine can prevent motion sickness if applied eight hours before travel; they are available by prescription only. Tips to avoid motion sickness include avoiding heavy meals at least two hours before traveling; eating light, easily digestible foods, like crackers, bread and canned fruit; not reading in the car or on a plane, train or boat when it’s in motion; and when traveling long distances by car, sitting in the front seat and focusing your eyes on the horizon.

GET PROPER VACCINATIONS BEFORE VENTURING OVERSEAS

Your immune system might need a “reservation” before going to some foreign countries. Yellow-fever vaccine is required for entry into some endemic-zone countries of Africa and South America. Travelers must carry an International Certificate of Vaccination signed by a physician and marked with an official stamp. Allow two

to four weeks for your body to develop immunity after being vaccinated. Rabies and typhoid vaccines are recommended to travelers to developing countries in Central and South America, Africa and Asia, especially for children. Risk of dog bites and exposure to contaminated food and water is higher in these countries. The rabies vaccine requires a month to administer. Allow two weeks for a typhoid vaccine. A vaccine for Japanese encephalitis is needed before going to rural areas of Asia. Protection against this mosquito-transmitted viral disease requires a series of three shots over one month, with the last dose injected 10 days prior to departure.

HIKERS: SUMMER SEASON RIPE FOR TICK-BORNE DISEASES

Hikers beware: Summer is the peak season for tick-borne illness. Travelers to grassy, wooded areas should take extra precautions against getting ticks on them, according to Dr. Wayne J. Riley, director of the Travel Medicine Service at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Ticks are most likely to be picked up when you brush against vegetation on which they’re perched. Because they are so tiny, you might not feel their bite. To keep ticks away, soak or spray clothes with insecticide called permethrin and allow them to air dry before packing. To deter ticks from biting, apply an insect repellent containing DEET on your exposed skin. If you find a tick on your skin, don’t squeeze or crush it; that can inject more harmful organisms into your blood. Remove the tick with tweezers or a special device sold in almost all sporting goods stores.

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