

White Coat Syndrome or White Coat Hypertension

- Some persons are thought to have a psychophysiological response to seeing doctors and other medical professionals, resulting in the development of “White Coat Syndrome” or “White Coat Hypertension.”
- White Coat Syndrome refers to cases where patients suffer from hypertension only while in the presence of a person in a “white coat.” Many patients feel anxious when going to see their physician, and may respond by becoming hypertensive.
- Over 40% of those people currently on medication for high blood pressure only have high blood pressure in the doctor’s office.
- In an article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 419 patients were found to have hypertension while at their doctor’s office. Patients were provided with portable blood-pressure monitoring devices that constantly measured their blood pressure levels outside of the office. The results found that 26% of the patients suffered from hypertension only while visiting their physician and were able to stop taking their medication with no ill effects. This finding suggests that a good deal of the patients who are presently being treated for hypertension may not need to be medicated.

Recommended Interventions for White Coat Syndrome or White Coat Hypertension

- When these folks are at home with their own blood pressure units and they take their blood pressure at various times of the day and during stressful situations, it is normal.
- Some healthcare providers recommend that you purchase your own unit and learn to take your own blood pressure. This is referred to as blood pressure self-monitoring.
- Bring the unit in during one of your visits to your primary healthcare provider so that he or she can check the accuracy of the unit.
- Identify situations or emotions that can lead to blood pressure spikes.
- If you are taking medication for hypertension, you should continue until your physician or healthcare provider recommends otherwise.

References

J.A. Staessen, Leuven, Belgium; G. Byttebier, Destelbergen, Belgium; F. Buntinx, H. Celis, Leuven, Belgium; E. T. O’ Brien, Dublin, Ireland; R. Fagard, Leuven, Belgium. Antihypertensive Treatment Based on Conventional or Ambulatory Blood Pressure Measurement: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *JAMA*. 1997;278:1065-1072