



## *One Doctor's Reasons for Deciding How to Treat High Blood Pressure*

Sometimes the more choices you have, the harder it is to make a decision.

Doctors have that problem when it comes to picking the medication that is best for high blood pressure.

There are five major types to choose from: ACE inhibitors; angiotensin-receptor blockers; beta blockers; calcium-channel blockers; and diuretics.

It gets even more complicated. There are subtypes within those five types. And different medications are combined into a single pill. Lotensin HCT is one example. It is a combination of an ACE inhibitor and a diuretic.

So how do doctors decide what to prescribe?

To see what one doctor does, we spoke with Dr. Sandra Taler. Taler is a physician at the Mayo Clinic, the world-famous medical center in Rochester, Minnesota.

Taler says the first type of drug that she usually prescribes is a diuretic: "I have always been a big fan of diuretics."

She is right in step with new government guidelines that say most people with high blood pressure should try a diuretic first.

Diuretics work by helping the kidneys get rid of sodium (a chemical that is part of salt) and water from the body. That decreases the volume of the blood, so there is less blood pounding against the walls of your blood vessels, creating high blood pressure.

There are two main types: loop and thiazide (pronounced THIGH-ah-zide). Most people taking a diuretic to control high blood pressure take a thiazide diuretic.

*Taler, continued on next page*

## High Blood Pressure: The Science Inside

Many patients worry that the pills will make them have to go to the bathroom more often. At first, a thiazide diuretic does increase urination. But after several weeks, most people's bodies adjust and levels return to normal.

Taler takes a different approach with her patients who have had a heart attack or experience the chest pain called angina that comes from the heart pumping without enough blood. For them, she'll prescribe a beta blocker.

Beta blockers slow down the heart, so it is not pumping blood through your blood vessels with as much force. Slowing down the heart helps if you've had heart trouble, because it means the heart isn't working as hard and can get by with less blood.

If someone has diabetes, Taler says she orders some kidney tests. Depending on the results, she would prescribe an ACE inhibitor. ACE inhibitors affect blood pressure by relaxing blood vessels but are less effective with excess sodium and water levels.

But treating high blood pressure with pills is no substitute for avoiding it in the first place. People get high blood pressure for many reasons, but weight gain and eating too much salty food are two of the main ones. Salty food raises blood pressure, and Taler says people don't have any idea just how salty the food is when they eat out.

"That's true at fancy restaurants," she adds. "It is not just McDonald's."