

**Tip 19 (April 2012)**

**Underdiagnosis and undertreatment of hypertension in young people.**

Many GP's are strangely reluctant to make a diagnosis of, and commence treatment for hypertension in young people, between the ages of 18 and 35. In addition, contact with doctors, especially for men in this age group, is often limited, so what should you do about an office blood pressure recording of (say) 150/90 in a slim fit 30 year old man who has paid you a very rare visit for a minor sports injury?

Don't look to the NZ Cardiovascular Risk Guideline<sup>1</sup> for help because you won't find it there. (The charts only apply to people aged 35-74, and in any event, if calculated, this chap's 5-year risk would be very low).

Three points to make here:

**This chap probably has hypertension, and if so needs treatment, because his long term (life time) cardiovascular risk is extremely high<sup>2</sup>. This may be your only opportunity to obviate that long term risk.**

**Hypertension is not rare in 18-35 year olds<sup>3</sup> (approximately 6% have it).**

**Although secondary causes are arguably a little more likely in young people, the vast majority in this age group will still have essential hypertension.**

The traditional teaching is to check his blood pressure on multiple occasions over a few months before making a formal diagnosis of hypertension. This may be difficult in busy young people. **My tip, in this situation, is to go straight for 24-hour ambulatory blood pressure monitoring.** This will immediately confirm or refute the diagnosis of hypertension. The new (August 2011) British Hypertension Society guideline<sup>4</sup> has gone as far as to suggest that 24-h ABPM should be routine in most patients to confirm the diagnosis of hypertension, prior to initiating therapy;- and certainly I would agree with this in regard to a young person such as this with moderately raised office blood pressure, but without obvious target organ damage

1. [http://www.nzgg.org.nz/library\\_resources/45\\_new\\_zealand\\_cardiovascular\\_guidelines\\_handbook\\_a\\_summary\\_resource\\_for\\_primary\\_care\\_practitioners](http://www.nzgg.org.nz/library_resources/45_new_zealand_cardiovascular_guidelines_handbook_a_summary_resource_for_primary_care_practitioners)
2. Marma AK, Berry *Circ Cardiovasc Qual Outcomes*. 2010;3:8-14
3. Fields LE, et al. *Hypertension*. 2004;44:398-404
4. <http://www.bhsoc.org/>