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HYPERTENSION 101: KEEPING BLOOD PRESSURE IN CHECK

GREENSBURG, PA, May 3, 2010 ... Hypertension, or high blood pressure, affects millions of Americans. The American Heart Association estimates nearly 30 percent of Americans have high blood pressure and one-third of those don't know they have it. It is often referred to as the "silent killer," as it doesn't have any symptoms and is only detected with regular blood pressure checks.

High blood pressure is dangerous because it overtaxes the heart and cardiovascular system. Over time, this strain can cause blood vessels to harden, narrow, and even burst. Hypertension is the main risk factor for stroke. It is also a major risk factor for heart disease, heart attack, and kidney disease. Dawn Davoli, RD, LDN, nutrition consultant for Excelsa Health's *Golden Hour* Cardiovascular Program, offers the following healthy lifestyle tips to lower blood pressure and reduce risk of heart attack and stroke:

- ✓ **Reduce Dietary Sodium** - This can be one of the most effective ways to lower your numbers. The average American eats twice the recommended amount of salt every day. Nearly 80 percent of that is hidden in processed foods and restaurant foods. "At one time, advising people to lose the salt shaker was enough, but now that's not the case with all the processed and packaged foods people eat," says Davoli. Eliminate obvious high sodium foods and choose fresh, frozen, or canned foods without added salt or try low-sodium versions.
- ✓ **Exercise Regularly** - According to the Mayo Clinic, regular aerobic exercise is a very effective way to lower blood pressure. Aim for at least 30 minutes daily. Becoming more active can lower your systolic pressure (the top number) by an average of 5-10 mmHg. It also improves blood sugar levels and your mood.

- ✓ **Quit Smoking** - Smoking causes the arteries to narrow, thereby increasing blood pressure. If you are ready to quit, Davoli suggests that you talk to your doctor about a regimen that is right for you. Studies indicate that using nicotine patches, lozenges, or even prescription drugs significantly improves your odds of successfully quitting.
- ✓ **Manage Stress** - Increased heart rate, as a result of high stress levels, causes the blood to be pumped more rapidly through the body. Try to make “me time,” say “no” to extra demands, and let go of things you have no control over.
- ✓ **Maintain a Healthy Weight** - A large body requires more blood, which puts more pressure on the blood vessels. If your weight is an issue, Davoli recommends contacting a registered dietitian who can set up a food plan tailored to your individual dietary needs. “Losing just 10 pounds can help reduce blood pressure or help prevent it in most overweight adults.”

To schedule an appointment with a dietitian, or seek tobacco cessation support, contact the Excelsa Health Call Center. 1-877-771-1234.

Hypertension by the Numbers

120/80 - Normal blood pressure

130/85 - Pre-Hypertension: especially important for those under age **40**

140/90 - High blood pressure

2,300 mg- The recommended daily amount of sodium for adults up to age **50**

1,500 mg - The recommended daily amount of sodium for adults older than **50**, African-Americans, and those with high blood pressure

4,000-6,000 mg - The amount of sodium that most people consume

1 teaspoon salt - Contains **2,300** mg of sodium Salt is **40%** sodium and **60%** chloride

77% - The amount of sodium in the diet that comes from processed and prepared foods

11% - The amount of sodium in the diet that is added from a salt shaker