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NEWS RELEASE

May is High Blood Pressure Month

Nearly 50 million Americans have high blood pressure. Of them, a little more than half are being treated for high blood pressure and less than 30 percent have it under control, says the Otsego County Department of Health. One-third of people with high blood pressure do not even know that they have it.

That's why this May, during High Blood Pressure Month, people should make a point to know their blood pressure numbers. If left untreated, high blood pressure greatly increases risk for stroke, heart attack, kidney and eye damage.

Although the exact cause of high blood pressure is not known, a number of factors are associated with the condition. People with diabetes or a family history of high blood pressure are at increased risk. Men and people over the age of 60 are also at greater risk.

You can prevent or delay the development of high blood pressure by:

- maintaining a healthy weight,
- getting at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day,
- eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products,
- limiting the use of salt or high sodium foods,
- avoiding tobacco products; and
- limiting alcohol to no more than two drinks a day for men and no more than 1 drink a day for women.

You usually do not experience symptoms with high blood pressure. A visit to your health care provider is the only way to find out if you have this condition. It's a good practice to have your blood pressure checked at least once a year, and more frequently if you've been diagnosed with high blood pressure

Your blood pressure measurement will be most accurate if you:

- avoid caffeine, smoking, or heavy exercise for at least 30 minutes in advance,
- have been seated quietly for at least five minutes,
- are seated on a chair (not an exam table), with your feet on the floor and your arm supported at heart level (by the arm of the chair, or a table).

Your health care provider may want to take a second measurement at the same visit. And, be sure to ask what your numbers are.

If your blood pressure is found to be high, the first course of treatment usually involves lifestyle changes such as eating foods low in fat and sodium, controlling your weight, getting regular physical activity, quitting smoking, and avoiding alcohol. Consistently making these changes may lower your blood pressure to normal levels without the use of medications, or reduce the number and amount of medication that you need to take.

For more information on high blood pressure and how it's treated, call the Otsego County Department of Health at 607-547-4230.