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## Counselling reduces high blood pressure

Intensive counselling can get people to make a wide array of lifestyle and dietary changes that will reduce their risk of developing high blood pressure, according to a major US clinical trial. But duplicating the trial's methods in the context of everyday patient care would be difficult.

High blood pressure is one of the 10 leading health risks worldwide and causes 7 million deaths a year, according to WHO's *World health report 2002*. More than three-quarters of cardiovascular disease can be traced to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, tobacco use, or a combination of those factors, the WHO report said.

Previous clinical trials of lifestyle modification and hypertension have focused on one intervention at a time. The new study, conducted at four clinical centres and published in the 23/30 April issue of *JAMA*, demonstrated that patients can cope with a large number of lifestyle changes all at once.

"What made this [study] different was that we counselled them on so many fronts," says Eva Obarzanek of the US National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in Bethesda (MD). "They had a lot of things to change."

In the study, 810 generally overweight adults with blood pressure in the above-optimal or stage one hypertensive range — that is, with systolic blood pressure (BP) ranging from 120–159 mm of mercury and diastolic BP of 80–95 mm — were divided into three groups for different regimens.

One group merely got advice — a 20–30-minute session with professional counsellors who handed out literature and discussed behavioural changes. Six months later, this group's mean

