High Blood Pressure - Hypertension

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Blood pressure naturally rises. If it is consistently higher than it should be, this is known as hypertension or high blood pressure.

High blood pressure is known as the 'silent killer' because there are usually no warning signs and no obvious symptoms. As a result, many people are unaware they have it and many people who are diagnosed often find it difficult to accept.

WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

When your heart beats it pumps blood around your body. This is vitally important because it supplies your body's tissues and organs with the oxygen and nutrients it needs to function.
As the blood moves, it pushes against the inner walls of your arteries.1 The force or strength of this pushing is your blood pressure.

High blood pressure occurs when your blood applies too much force against the walls of your blood vessels.[2a] Elevated blood pressure is not necessarily cause for concern. For example, it increases when you exercise or when you are stressed.[3a] This is normal. However, if your blood pressure is persistently high, over a longer period of time it can lead to serious complications such as increasing your risk of:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Kidney failure
- Blindness
- Blood vessel damage
- Sudden cardiac death[4]

Hypertension is the medical term for High Blood Pressure

High Blood Pressure

WHO GETS IT?

High blood pressure occurs more frequently in older people but it affects most people in adulthood to some extent.[3b] While certain risk factors such as age and genetics cannot be modified, there are numerous factors such as lifestyle choices that can be controlled.

Regardless, hypertension does not go away on its own so it's important to know what causes it, who is at risk and to get your blood pressure checked at least once a year.[2b]

According to the World Health Organisation, of the estimated 1.13 billion people who have high blood pressure, fewer than 1 in 5 have it under control

CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS

Hypertension is often described as either primary or secondary.

PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (UNKNOWN CAUSES)

Also known as essential hypertension, primary hypertension is the most common type. It usually takes years to develop, and while it has no single identifiable cause, a combination of risk factors may play a role including:

- Genetics – gene mutations or abnormalities inherited from your parents
- Age - physical changes in the body as you get older
- Lifestyle – being overweight, lack of exercise, too much alcohol, smoking, and a high salt diet, sleep deprivation[6a, 7a]

SECONDARY HYPERTENSION (CAUSED BY OTHER CONDITIONS AND MEDICATIONS)

Secondary hypertension often occurs faster than primary hypertension. Causes may include:

- Tumours in the adrenal gland
- Thyroid problems – if the thyroid produces too much or too little thyroid hormone
- Obstructive sleep apnea – a condition where a person's breathing regularly stops and starts while sleeping
- Congenital vascular malformation – hereditary problems with blood vessels
- Certain prescription medications such as oral contraceptives
- Alcoholism or drinking too much alcohol[7b, 8]

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Unlike a cold or flu, asthma, or a migraine, you cannot 'feel' high blood pressure. If you experience symptoms such as headaches, shortness of breath, dizziness, chest pain or nosebleeds, your blood pressure levels are likely at a dangerous or life-threatening stage.[2c, 6b]

You can have high blood pressure for years and not have any symptoms. Even when blood pressure elevates to dangerous levels, **many people experience no signs or symptoms**[2c]

HOW IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE DIAGNOSED?

High blood pressure is easily detected. Diagnosis is simple and pain free. All you need is a blood pressure measurement taken by a healthcare professional (doctor, clinic sister or nurse) using an inflatable arm cuff and pressure measuring gauge or stethoscope.

Your blood pressure measurement recording shows two numbers, expressed as systolic blood pressure (SBP) over diastolic blood pressure (DB).

DIASTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE[3D, 5C, 9B]

- The bottom number measures the pressure inside your artery when your heart rests between beats and refills with blood. The cycle in which your blood pressure falls is called diastole.

SYSTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE[3C, 5B, 9A]

- The top number measures the pressure inside your artery when your heart contracts, or beats and pumps blood through your body. Blood pressure is at its highest or in its peak cycle, which is called systole.

Understanding your blood pressure numbers:

Definitions and classification of office BP (mmHg)

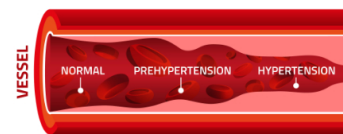| Stage	Systolic BP (mmHg)	Diastolic BP (mmHg)
Normal	< 120	< 80
Optimal	120–129	80–84
High normal	130–139	85–89
Grade 1	140–159	90–99
Grade 2	160–179	100–109
Grade 3	≥ 180	≥ 110
Isolated systolic	≥ 140	< 90
BP should be categorised into the highest level of BP whether systolic or diastolic.		

IF YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE READING IS HIGH[6C]

If your blood pressure measurement is high, you may need to have more readings taken in the following days or weeks. A hypertension diagnosis is seldom given after just one measurement. There could be various reasons for your elevated blood levels such as stress about an upcoming business pitch. Also, keep in mind that your blood pressure naturally goes up and down throughout the day.

SYSTOLIC PRESSURE → Is measured between when the heart contracts

VESSEL — NORMAL — PREHYPERTENSION — HYPERTENSION

DIASTOLIC PRESSURE → Is measured between beats when the heart relaxes

Blood Pressure
VECTOR INFOGRAPHIC

Blood Pressure is the pressure exerted by circulating blood upon the walls of blood vessels.

HOW TO TREAT HYPERTENSION

Various factors, such as identified causes help to inform treatment options, which will likely start with lifestyle changes to lower your blood pressure particularly when it comes to primary hypertension. Lifestyle changes may be sufficient if your blood pressure levels are elevated but, if your blood pressure is really high, your doctor may prescribe medication straight away.[6d]

In the case of secondary hypertension, if your doctor identifies an underlying health condition, he or she will:

- Recommend treatment to address the underlying condition or [6e]

If certain medications you are taking to treat a pre-existing condition are raising your blood pressure levels, he or she will:

- Change your medication[6f]

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Most doctors and clinic sisters take a blood pressure reading as part of a routine visit. If you don't receive one at your next appointment, request it.

If your blood pressure sits in the healthy (normal) range, maintain or adopt a healthy lifestyle to prevent or delay the onset of high blood pressure. Eat a heart-healthy diet and limit your salt intake, exercise regularly, and limit your alcohol intake.[2c]

If you discover your blood pressure does not sit in the healthy range, a healthy lifestyle together with medication often helps to bring it under control to reduce your risk of life-threatening complications.[2d]

Please note: This is educational information only and should not be used for diagnosis. For more information on high blood pressure, consult your healthcare professional.

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