

Hypertension



Blood pressure rises and falls. When it stays elevated, you have high blood pressure or 'hypertension'.

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WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of your arteries.^{1,2} You need a certain amount of pressure in your arteries to keep the blood flowing.²

- Blood pressure is at its highest when your heart muscle contracts and pumps blood to all parts of your body – systolic blood pressure (SBP).
- Your lowest level of blood pressure is when your heart is at rest between heart beats – diastolic blood pressure (DBP).^{1,2}

Blood pressure is usually written as SBP/DBP, and is measured in millimeters of mercury, e.g. 120/80 mmHg.^{1,2}



HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE CAN BE HARMFUL TO YOU

Blood pressure rises and falls during the day. When it stays elevated over time, you have high blood pressure or 'hypertension'. This can be harmful to you because it makes your heart work too hard. The high force of the blood flow can harm arteries and organs such as the heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes.^{2,3}

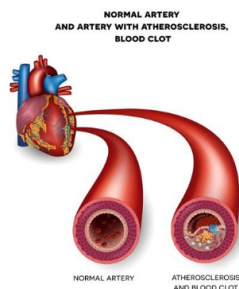
You have hypertension if your blood pressure reading is 140/90 mmHg or higher.^{1,4} Both the SBP and DBP numbers are important; if either of them is above the cut-off point, you have hypertension.¹ For individuals aged 40 to 70 years, each increase of 20mmHg in SBP or 10mmHg in DBP doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease.⁵

Blood pressure goals^{6,7,8}

	Goal SBP	DBP
For people at low risk of complications	Less than 140mmHg	Less than 90mmHg
People with diabetes or a history of heart disease	Less than 130mmHg	Less than 80mmHg

IF UNTREATED HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE CAN CAUSE: 1, 2, 8

- Heart failure
- Small bulges (aneurysms) in the arteries
- Kidney failure
- Atherosclerosis (hardening and narrowing of the arteries) caused by a slow build-up of plaque on the inside walls of the arteries – this can cause a heart attack, stroke or kidney failure
- Blood vessels in the eye to burst or bleed – this may cause changes in your vision and result in blindness



CAUSES AND ARE YOU AT RISK?

The exact cause of high blood pressure is unknown but the following may play a role:²

- Lack of physical activity²
- Being overweight or obese^{1,2,4,6}
- High alcohol consumption²
- Too much salt in your diet²
- Too little potassium in your diet¹
- Smoking^{4,5,6}
- Genetics – if anyone in your family has experienced high blood pressure or a stroke, you are more likely to have it^{1,2,4,6}
- Diabetes^{5,6}
- Some medications such as oral contraceptives²
- If you are older than 55 (men) or 65 (women)^{4,5,6}



Commonly prescribed medications can lower blood pressure^{8,9} and may have protective benefits for the heart and kidneys⁸

Up to 8% of men and 11% of women 30 years or older in South Africa have died due to high blood pressure.¹



SYMPTOMS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure is known as the silent killer because it usually has no symptoms or warning signs.^{1,2} The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it measured by a healthcare professional with the necessary equipment.²

About six million South Africans 15 years and older suffer from hypertension, of whom millions are not diagnosed and even more inadequately treated.¹ It is usually a lifelong condition and should not be taken lightly.¹ Up to 8% of men and 11% of women 30 years or older in South Africa have died from high blood pressure.¹

HOW TO CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE 1, 2, 3, 9

The Department of Health in South Africa recommends a healthy lifestyle as the best way to manage hypertension. Research shows that a healthy lifestyle will:

- Reduce your blood pressure
- Make your high blood pressure medication work more effectively
- Reduce your risk of heart disease

Basic lifestyle changes to give yourself the best chance of managing hypertension and improve your health:

- Be physically active and aim for 30 minutes of exercise a day^{1,2,3,4}
- If you are overweight, lose weight and reduce your waist size^{2,4}
- Eat more potassium-rich fruit and vegetables such as bananas, apricots, potatoes, sweet potatoes and spinach³
- Consume less than 2400 mg of salt a day (less than one teaspoon)⁹
- Reduce alcohol intake^{2,4}



Men: no more than 3 to 4 units of alcohol a day	One unit of alcohol is equal to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small glass (100ml) of wine [10% alcohol by volume] • 300 ml of normal strength cider, lager or beer • 25 ml of spirits
Women: no more than 2 to 3 units of alcohol a day	

- Stop smoking – if you are a smoker, stopping smoking is the single most important step you can take to improve your heart health^{2,4}

About 6 million South Africans 15 years and older suffer from hypertension¹

WILL YOU REQUIRE PRESCRIBED MEDICATION?

If your blood pressure remains high despite making changes to your lifestyle for 6-12 months, your doctor may prescribe medication.⁹ Commonly prescribed medications can lower blood pressure^{8,9} and may have protective benefits for your heart and kidneys⁸

Commonly prescribed medications^{8,9}



ACE Inhibitors	Helps to relax and widen blood vessels, which lowers blood pressure level
Angiotensin-II receptor antagonists (ARBs)	Helps to relax and widen blood vessels, which lowers blood pressure
Calcium-channel blockers	Reduces the amount of calcium entering the muscle cells of the arteries and the heart, which causes them to relax and widen
Diuretics	"Water tablets" act on the kidneys to increase the output of water and salt in the urine
Other medications include alpha-blockers and beta-blockers	

High blood pressure is usually a lifelong condition and should not be taken lightly⁹

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