

Hypertension Factsheet No: I

What Is Hypertension?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of the blood vessels (artery) as it circulates through your body. Blood pressure normally rises and falls throughout the day, but it can cause health problems if it stays high for a long time. High blood pressure is labeled as "Hypertension".

Why Is It Important To Maintain Blood Pressure In The Normal Range?

By keeping your blood pressure in the healthy range, you are:

- Reducing your risk of the walls of your blood vessels becoming overstretched and injured
- Reducing your risk of having a heart attack or stroke; and of developing heart failure and kidney failure.
- Protecting your entire body by maintaining regular supplies of oxygen rich blood

How Is High Blood Pressure Diagnosed?

Blood pressure is checked by wrapping an inflatable cuff with a pressure gauge around the arm to squeeze the blood vessels. Then the doctor listens to your pulse with a stethoscope while releasing air from the cuff. The gauge measures the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart beats (systolic) and when it rests (diastolic).

Can High Blood Pressure Be Prevented?

Following steps can help to maintain normal blood pressure levels:

- You must get blood pressure checked regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Exercise regularly
- Limit alcohol use
- Reduce or quit smoking
- Prevent or manage Diabetes

What Are The Common Myths About High Blood Pressure?

Myth I. High blood pressure runs in my family. There is nothing I can do. I will get it too.

Fact I: If your parents or close blood relatives have had high blood pressure, you are more likely to develop it, too. However, lifestyle choices have allowed many people with a family history of high blood pressure to avoid it themselves.

Myth II. I don't use table salt, so I'm in control of my sodium intake and my blood pressure isn't affected.

Fact II: Checking salt intake means reducing salt in cooked meals as well as checking labels on food products, because up to 75% of the sodium we consume is hidden in processed foods like tomato sauce, soups, condiments, canned foods, pickles and prepared mixes. When buying prepared and prepackaged foods, read the labels.

Myth III. People with high blood pressure have nervousness, sweating, difficulty sleeping and their face becomes flushed. I don't have those symptoms so I must not have high blood pressure.

Fact III: Many people have high blood pressure for years without knowing it. High blood pressure is often called "the silent killer" because it has no symptoms, so you may not be aware that it's damaging your arteries, heart and other organs.

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