

High Blood Pressure

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High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a long-term medical condition in which your blood pressure is persistently above normal. It typically does not cause major symptoms, but holds an extremely high risk for strokes, heart failure, vision loss and kidney failure. High blood pressure is extremely prevalent in South Africa, and therefore you should be aware of it.

Causes

Various lifestyle problems can increase your chance of developing high blood pressure. These include:

- Excess salt in your diet
- Being overweight or obese
- Smoking
- Alcohol use
- Minimal physical activity & minimal exercise
- Unhealthy diet
- Drugs such as cocaine
- Kidney diseases can also cause high blood pressure

By making various lifestyle changes, you can decrease your blood pressure and decrease your risk of developing any of the risk factors, mentioned above. High blood pressure is more prevalent in older people. Normal blood pressure levels are 120/80.

Prevention

- Eat a low salt diet
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes, 4 to 5 times per week (See page 89-90)
- Limit your alcohol intake
- Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables
- Decrease your stress with the help of certain strategies, such as breathing exercises and spending some time outdoors or with friends and family
- DO NOT SMOKE

Symptoms

Although the long term complications of high blood pressure can be devastating, patients usually do not really present with symptoms. Some symptoms may include headaches, lightheadedness, altered vision or fainting. High blood pressure during pregnancy can also be very dangerous to the mother and her baby.



Diagnosis

A person are typically diagnosed when their blood pressure, at rest, is over 140/90 during at least three occasions. Your doctor will decide if you have high blood pressure and prescribe medication if necessary.

Treatment

High blood pressure is one of the biggest distributors of preventable death in South Africa. The most important way of treating high blood pressure is making certain lifestyle changes. When you have done this and still experience high blood pressure, you should visit your doctor for chronic blood pressure medication. To prevent the various consequences of high blood pressure, such as heart attacks, strokes and kidney diseases, your blood pressure should be maintained at a certain normal level, as best as is possible.

