

Measure your Pressure this May

15 May 2017

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) supports World Hypertension Day on 17 May as we encourage all South Africans to measure their blood pressure and know their risk for heart disease and stroke because it can happen to you! #MeasureYourPressure

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is one of the most common risk factors for stroke, heart attacks and kidney disease within the South African population. About 25% of South African adults are hypertensive and consequently carry increased risk for suffering of a stroke or a heart attack. “The unfortunate consequence of this statistic is that many strokes and heart attacks in the South African population could be prevented if the undiagnosed and uncontrolled hypertensive South Africans were identified and provided with the necessary blood pressure lowering medication. Such life-long medication, if taken by sufficient numbers of people with hypertension, will reduce the number of us suffering a stroke or a heart attack” notes Dr Krisela Steyn, Board member of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa.

1 in 3 South Africans, 15 years and older have hypertension¹, with the highest rate of high blood pressure reported among people aged 50 and over for any country in the world. Almost 8 out of 10 people in this age group are being diagnosed with high blood pressure² and a shocking 1 in 10 children are already suffering from high blood pressure³. Sadly, a large portion of the population have no idea they have high blood pressure or are predisposed to it because high blood pressure displays no obvious symptoms and is therefore known as the ‘silent killer’. The only way to have peace of mind is to get tested regularly, especially if you have raised blood pressure combined with other risk factors such as obesity, smoking, unhealthy eating, physical inactivity. If you are found to be pre-hypertensive or hypertensive at the time of being tested, you need to consult a medical specialist who will decide on whether you need to be treated.

“Throughout the world but particularly in South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, hypertension is by far the most important risk factor for cardiovascular disease responsible for death and disability from stroke, heart attacks, heart failure and kidney failure. Its significance derives not only from the catastrophic consequences of this condition, but also from the sheer numbers of people it affects” warns Prof. Richard Nethononda, Associate professor and consultant in Cardiology and Cardiac MRI, and HSFSA board member.

A simple blood pressure test can distinguish if your blood pressure is normal and is a test to be taken annually, or as often as you like, to be well informed about your own health. A blood pressure measurement is made up of two values: systolic pressure, when the heart contracts; and diastolic pressure, when the heart relaxes between beats. Both numbers of your blood pressure reading are of equal importance. Blood pressure should be checked every year from the age of 18 years, and more often when your blood pressure is already high.

High blood pressure or hypertension is not diagnosed by a single measurement, this only points out when someone needs to seek further medical assessment. If blood pressure falls in the pre-

hypertensive category, it provides an opportunity to improve blood pressure by making lifestyle changes, before it progresses to hypertension. The test is certainly of importance for peace of mind and also to identify those who are currently hypertensive without knowing which makes them incredibly vulnerable to having an unexpected heart attack or stroke due to undiagnosed hypertension. High BP can be controlled effectively with a combination of medication, a healthy diet, exercise, and regular monitoring.

Stage	Systolic BP	Diastolic BP	Action*
Normal	120 – 129	80 – 84	Keep up the good work and stick with heart-healthy habits like eating well and exercising regularly.
Pre-hypertension	130 - 139	85 – 89	Make lifestyle changes to lower your blood pressure.
Hypertensive (stage 1)	140 – 159	90 – 99	See your doctor/GP as soon as you can.
Hypertensive (stage 2)	160 – 179	100 – 109	See your doctor/GP as soon as you can.
Hypertensive emergency	>180	>110	Requires emergency medical attention. Go to a hospital.

“Knowing your blood pressure measurement and which category of risk you fall into is not enough. It is very important to act on the advice given to you by the health practitioner who conducts your assessment. Getting medical help immediately if you are found to be at high risk for cardiovascular disease due to elevated levels of blood pressure can save your life and prevent disability which may arise from heart disease and/or stroke” advises Prof. Pamela Naidoo, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa.

Some risk factors for high blood pressure are out of our control such as our age, gender, genetics, pregnancy and family history. Fortunately, there are many risk factors that we *can* control such as physical inactivity, poor diet, smoking, harmful use of alcohol, being overweight or obese, stress and having uncontrolled diabetes. However, high blood pressure is the leading risk factor for developing cardiovascular disease in South Africa, responsible for 1 in 2 strokes and 2 in 5 heart attacks. Therefore, it's extremely important to measure your blood pressure, which is done easily, quickly and painlessly with an inflatable cuff.

The many risks factors for high blood pressure in South Africa, combined with under diagnosis and poor control result in too many South Africans developing severe high blood pressure, and hypertension at an earlier age. Uncontrolled high blood pressure is responsible for 65% of kidney disease in South Africa, which in turn increases the risk of heart disease 5 to 8-fold. “In South Africa, the majority of people who develop kidney failure don’t have access to life-saving dialysis treatment. This means improving the diagnosis and control of high blood pressure is critical” says Gabriel Eksteen, physiologist and dietitian at the Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa.

This May Measurement Month, the HSFSA urges South Africans to know what their blood pressure is by having it measured. Knowing your blood pressure reading and what lifestyle changes you can make to keep it down will give you the upper hand to prevent developing heart disease and suffering a heart attack or stroke. It is your challenge to measure your pressure and get as many people around you to get their blood pressure checked this May Measurement Month. Remember one should sit still for 5 minutes before the BP reading is taken and at least 3 readings should be taken at 2 minute intervals to ensure that accurate BP measurements are identified. To be healthy your BP should be 140/95 mmHg or lower.

Blood pressure can be measured at your local clinic, doctor or pharmacy. The HSFSA will be conducting free blood pressure assessments within communities during the measurement month of May. Please refer to the table below or details can be found on our website www.heartfoundation.co.za:

City / Province	Date	Time	Venue
Table View, WC	17 May 2017	09h00 - 15h00	Bayside Mall
Khayelitsha, WC	26 May 2017	09h00 - 15h00	GAPA
Port Elizabeth, EC	23 May 2017	10h00 - 13h00	Hoza Club, Cecil Kapi Community Hall
KwaZulu Natal	18 May 2017	10:00 - 15h00	Elangeni College- Mpumalanga Campus
KwaZulu Natal	29 May 2017	10:00 - 15h00	Newlands West Center - Checkout

For more information about these events please visit www.heartfoundation.co.za or call the appropriate regional office:

Cape Town: 021-422 1586

Port Elizabeth: 041-582 4086

Durban: 031-261 9055

References:

1. Ardington, Case. National Income Dynamics Study Health: Analysis of the NIDS Wave. 1 Dataset. Discussion paper No. 2. Cape Town: South African Labour & Development Research Unit, University of Cape Town, 2009.
2. Sherlock et al. Hypertension among older adults in low- and middle-income countries: prevalence, awareness and control. International Journal of Epidemiology. 2014, 1-13
3. Monyeli K, Kemper H, Makgae P. Relationship between fat patterns, physical fitness and blood pressure, of rural South African children: Ellisras Longitudinal Growth and Health Study. Journal of Human Hypertension 2008 May; 22(5): 311-9

*YK Seedat, BL Rayner, Yosuf Veriava. South African hypertension practice guideline 2014. Cardiovasc J Afr 2014; 25: 288–294

Link: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4327181/pdf/cvja-25-288.pdf>

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About the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) plays a leading role in the fight against preventable heart disease and stroke, with the aim of seeing fewer people in South Africa suffer premature deaths and disabilities. The HSFSA, established in 1980 is a non-governmental, non-profit organization which relies on external funding to sustain the work it carries out.

The HSFSA aims to reduce the cardiovascular disease (CVD) burden in South Africa and ultimately on the health care system of South Africa. Our mission is to empower people in South Africa to adopt healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices easier, seek appropriate care and encourage prevention.

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