

## **WORLD HYPERTENSION DAY 2018: A FOCUS ON OLDER ADULTS**

In low and middle-income countries (LMICS) there is a shift from a higher prevalence of communicable diseases, such as HIV and TB, to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer. South Africa is classified as a middle-income country.

Hypertension (increased blood pressure) is a key NCDs risk factor. The increasing prevalence of hypertension is thought to be associated with development, urbanization, and life-style changes. The condition of hypertension increases with age although it is important to remember that it is a readily treatable risk factor for the most common causes of morbidity and mortality in older adults making them vulnerable to the onset of stroke, ischaemic heart disease, renal insufficiency and dementia.

Prof Pamela Naidoo CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) states that “given that hypertension is treatable, it is important to know whether in fact you are at risk”. She goes on to say that “very often individuals have raised blood pressure which can be at a dangerously critical level but individuals are unaware”. As one ages it is important to have your blood pressure checked at least once or twice annually to prevent becoming a “victim” of the condition which is often called the “silent killer”. Moreover, if you have been diagnosed with hypertension, taking your medication as prescribed combined with a healthy lifestyle is essential to achieving blood pressure control to maintain your physical well-being.

***How is blood pressure defined?*** A blood pressure measurement is made up of two values: systolic pressure (upper value), when the heart contracts; and diastolic pressure (lower value), when the heart relaxes between beats. Both numbers of your blood pressure reading are of equal importance. In South Africa we currently define the optimum blood pressure measure to be 120 (systolic measure) /80 (diastolic measure).

How severe is the problem of hypertension around the world and more especially in the African region, including South Africa? Worldwide, raised blood pressure is estimated to cause 7.5 million deaths, which is about 12.8% of the total of all annual deaths. The number of people with uncontrolled hypertension has risen from 600 million in 1980 to nearly one billion in 2008. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), undetected and uncontrolled hypertension that increases the cardiovascular risk is a major contributor to stroke worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa as compared to the rest of the world, males over the age of 25 years have a prevalence of hypertension of between 48% and 55.5% and females in this age group have a prevalence of between 43% and 50%.

Prof Naidoo of the HSFSA states that “there are very practical ways of reducing and preventing high blood pressure. Low salt intake, increasing physical activity, and taking medication as prescribed are simple ways to achieve a good blood pressure measure of 120/80 mmHg”. Bianca Tromp, dietitian at the HSFSA reminds us that “South Africa has very advanced salt reduction regulations as compared to many other countries in the world which should make it easier for our citizens to reduce their salt intake to no more than 5mg per day”. The Foundations

CEO makes a point that “individuals need to take more responsibility for their health and master the art of self-management whilst ensuring that they have regular medical follow-ups particularly if they are at risk for hypertension.”

The table below is a general guideline on how frequently different age groups at risk or no obvious risk should have their blood pressure measured.

**Table 1: Guidelines for having your blood pressure done**

Age	Risk for Developing Hypertension	Visit a health practitioner for blood pressure measurement
18-39	Low risk	Once annually
40 -59	Medium risk	Once to twice annually
60 +	High risk	At least twice annually

Do remember that these are only guidelines based on the assumptions that a person does not have other risk factors. If you lead an unhealthy lifestyle and have a family history of high blood pressure you should have your blood pressure measured more often. **#MeasureYourPressure**

The Health Promotions team at the HSFSa reminds us that good quality blood pressure machines can be purchased for home use although it is very important to know how to use the machine to obtain a correct reading. The HSFSa conducts community-based health risk assessments (which includes blood pressure measures) in selected communities and organizations. Please contact our offices in Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth to enquire about our Health Promotion initiatives which includes a comprehensive health risk assessment.

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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.