



World Hypertension Day Fact Sheet

1. What is hypertension?

- Hypertension is defined as a constant elevated blood pressure (above 140/90), due to the pressure that is exerted within the blood vessels when the heart pumps & relaxes.
- Familial hypertension on the other hand is a genetic/ inherited high blood pressure
- Gestational Hypertension is an elevated blood pressure only during pregnancy
- Hypertension is a primary risk factor for cardiovascular diseases including strokes, heart failure, heart attacks, & angina
- Hypertension has also been marked as a risk factor for severe symptoms of Covid19 in recent studies
- It is also known as a silent killer, as it has no symptoms / symptoms may go unnoticed.

2. Key drivers of hypertension

- Family history of hypertension
- Age: the likelihood of blood pressure increases with age. Nearly 8 in 10 South Africans over the age of 55 years have high blood pressure.
- Physical inactivity
- An unhealthy diet high in salt and low in fruits and vegetables
- Being overweight or obese
- Excessive alcohol intake
- Smoking and tobacco use

3. Table depicting the AHA/SA Heart /Hypertension League recommended guidelines and appropriate treatment

Stage	Systolic BP (mmHg)		Diastolic (mmHg)	Action
Normal and Optimal	Below 130	and	Below 85	Keep up the good work and stick with heart healthy habits
High normal	130 – 139	or	85 - 89	Make lifestyle changes to lower blood pressure
Mild hypertension	140 – 159	or	90 – 99	See a doctor or GP as soon as possible
Moderate hypertension	160 – 179	or	100 – 109	See a doctor or GP as soon as possible
Hypertensive emergency	Above 180	or	Above 110	Requires emergency medical attention. Go to a hospital

Source: European Society of Cardiology

Appropriate Treatment:

Treatment options for a person who is already been diagnosed with hypertension includes self-management and medication

- Self-Management:

- eating heart healthy diet less in salt
- getting regular physical exercise
- limiting the exercise use of alcohol
- quitting smoking
- monitoring blood pressure depending on your risk profile

- Medication will depend on a pattern in a person's blood pressure measurements and overall health profile; i.e.:

- Diuretics- helps if there's suspected water retention
- Enzyme inhibitors- helps relax blood vessels
- receptor blockers- also relaxes blood vessels
- betablockers- help in decreasing/ lowering the rapid heart beat
- vasodilators- help prevent tightening and narrowing of the arteries

4. Hypertension prevention and detection: know your numbers

Making small lifestyle changes can make steady improvements in blood pressure. Together, these changes can make a big difference!

- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet.** Regularly eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lentils and beans, and low-fat dairy have been proven to effectively reduce blood pressure. In fact, scientists specifically designed a diet called *Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension*, also known as the DASH diet. This diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, whole grains, poultry, fish and nuts; and limits sugary drinks, sweets and red meat.
- **Cut down on salt.** A high salt intake is linked to high blood pressure. Reduce the salt added to food during cooking and at the table. Make use of fresh and dried herbs, spices, garlic, ginger, chili and lemon juice to add flavour to food, without adding too much salt or salty ingredients like chicken or BBQ spice. Foods like packet soups, stock cubes, gravies, cheese, many breakfast cereals, breads, salty snacks, processed meats and fast foods are very high in salt, so should be used sparingly too.
- Remember you don't have to spend hours reading labels. **Always look out for the Heart Mark** on food packaging to help you choose healthier food options.
- **Get active.** Moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity can effectively reduce systolic blood pressure over several months by an average of 10 mmHg.
- **Be smoke-free.** After each cigarette blood pressure will temporarily increase for 30 minutes! Chronic smoking increases the stiffness of blood vessel walls, making the damage caused by high blood pressure even worse.
- **Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.** If overweight, losing even 2 to 5 kg of weight can already help to reduce blood pressure, and even greater reductions can be achieved with further weight loss towards a healthy weight.
- **Manage stress.** Stress and anxiety can directly increase blood pressure and indirectly lead to unhealthy habits such as poor dietary choices, not enough exercise, and tobacco or alcohol use.
- **Limit alcohol.** Women should not regularly exceed one alcoholic drink per day, and men should not drink more than two alcoholic drinks per day. People with very high blood pressure should ideally avoid alcohol completely or discuss their alcohol intake with their doctor first.
- **Take medication regularly.** Not taking blood pressure medications correctly is one of the most common causes of uncontrolled high blood pressure. Prescribed medication for hypertension should be taken regularly as instructed by a doctor or nurse.
- **Know your numbers.** Even when taking blood pressure medication, blood pressure may remain too high or increase again over time. Blood pressure should be checked regularly, or as recommended by a doctor or nurse.

5. Most important messages to conclude with

In South Africa, the high prevalence of hypertension is a great concern. An estimated 50% of South African adults are living with hypertension which is a key driver for cardiovascular disease. Approximately four in ten adults older than 25 years have hypertension and this means 75% of the world's hypertension population are at risk and are potential candidates for heart disease, strokes, kidney disease or even sudden death.

Improving prevention and control of hypertension is a major concern, even more so during the global COVID-19 pandemic because hypertension puts you at higher risk of contracting severe symptoms of COVID-19.

We encourage people to adopt simple health-seeking behaviour changes that can help to prevent hypertension and to keep those who are hypertensive in good health. It is important to ***measure your blood pressure accurately*** and know your blood pressure status, ***control it*** by taking your medication, so you can ***live longer*** even if you are hypertensive.

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