HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Understanding blood pressure numbers[10]

Definitions and classification of office BP (mmHg)

Stage	Systolic BP	Diastolic BP
Normal	<120	<80
Optimal	120 - 129	80 - 84
High normal	130 - 139	85 - 89
Grade 1	140 - 159	90-99
Grade 2	160-179	100 - 109
Grade 3	≥180	≥110
Isolated systolic	≥140	<90

BP should be categorised into the highest level of BP whether systolic or diastolic

If your blood pressure reading is high[6c]

A hypertension diagnosis is seldom given after one measurement. You may need to have more readings taken in the following days or weeks.

HOW TO TREAT HYPERTENSION

If you are diagnosed with primary hypertension your treatment will likely start with lifestyle changes. However, if your blood pressure is really high, your doctor may prescribe medication straight away.

In the case of secondary hypertension:

- If your doctor identifies an underlying health condition, he or she will recommend treatment to address that condition[6e]
- If certain medications you are already taking to treat a pre-existing condition are raising your blood pressure levels, your doctor will likely change your medication[6f]

KNOW THAT YOU KNOW

Most doctors and clinic sisters take a blood pressure reading as part of a routine visit. If you don't receive one at your next appointment, request it.

You can prevent or delay the onset of high blood pressure by eating a heart-healthy diet, limiting your salt and alcohol intake, and exercising regularly.[2c]

If you discover your blood pressure does not sit in the healthy range, a healthy lifestyle together with medication often helps to bring it under control to reduce your risk of life-threatening complications.[2d]

Please Note: This is educational information only and should not be used for diagnosis. For more information on high blood pressure, consult your healthcare professional.

References: **1.** Blood Pressure UK. What is blood pressure. Available at: http://www.bloodpressureuk.org/BloodPressureandyou/Thebasics/Bloodpressure. Accessed 9 July 2019. **2.**Mayo Clinic. High blood pressure (hypertension). Available at: https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/symptoms-causes/syc-20373410. Accessed 9 July 2019. **3.** Johns Hopkins Medicine. High Blood Pressure/Hypertension. Available at: https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/high-blood-pressure-hypertension. Accessed 9 July 2019. **4.** Medical News Today. Everything you need to know about hypertension. Available at: https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/150109.php. Accessed 9 July 2019. **5.** World Health Organization. Hypertension. Available at: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hypertension. Accessed 9 July 2019. **6.**Healthline. What is high blood pressure? Available at: https://www.healthline.com/health/high-blood-pressure-hypertension#overview. Accessed on 9 July 2019. **7.** NHS. High blood pressure (hypertension). Available at: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/high-blood-pressure-hypertension/causes/. Accessed 9 July 2019. **8.** Health University of Utah. High Blood Pressure: Hypertension Clinic. Available at: https://healthcare.utah.edu/cardiovascular/treatments/hypertension-clinic.php. Accessed 9 July 2019. **9.** The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa. Blood Pressure. Available at: http://www.heartfoundation.co.za/blood-pressure/ **10.** South African Hypertension guideline 2014.

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HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure is known as the 'silent killer' because there are usually no warning signs and no obvious symptoms. As a result, many people are unaware they have it.

WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

When your heart beats it pumps blood around your body. This is vitally important because it supplies your body's tissues and organs with the oxygen and nutrients it needs to function.

As the blood moves, it pushes against the inner walls of your arteries.[1] The force or strength of this pushing is your blood pressure.

High blood pressure occurs when your blood applies too much force against the walls of your blood vessels.[2a] Elevated blood pressure is not necessarily cause for concern because your blood pressure naturally goes up and down throughout the day. For example, it increases when you exercise or when you are stressed.[3a] However, if your blood pressure is persistently high, over a longer period of time it can increase your risk for:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Kidney failure
- Blindness
- Blood vessel damage
- Sudden cardiac death[4]

> ***Hypertension* is the medical term for high blood pressure.**



WHO GETS IT?

High blood pressure affects people in adulthood, occurring more frequently in older people.

CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS

Hypertension is often described as either primary or secondary.

Primary hypertension (unknown causes)

Also known as essential hypertension, primary hypertension is the most common type. It usually takes years to develop, and while it has no single identifiable cause, a combination of risk factors may play a role including:

- *Genetics* – can be inherited from your parents
- *Age* – physical changes in the body as you get older
- *Lifestyle* – being overweight, lack of exercise, too much alcohol, smoking, and a high salt diet, sleep deprivation[6a, 7a]

Secondary hypertension (caused by other conditions and medications)

Secondary hypertension often occurs faster than primary hypertension. Causes may include:

- Tumours in the adrenal gland
- Thyroid problems – if the thyroid produces too much or too little thyroid hormone
- Obstructive sleep apnea – a condition where a person's breathing regularly stops and starts while sleeping
- Congenital vascular malformation – hereditary problems with blood vessels
- Certain prescription medications such as oral contraceptives
- Alcoholism or drinking too much alcohol[7b, 8]

> ***You can have high blood pressure for years and not have any symptoms. Even when blood pressure elevates to dangerously high levels, many people experience no signs or symptoms.[2c]***

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Unlike a cold or flu, asthma, or a migraine, you cannot 'feel' high blood pressure. If you experience symptoms such as headaches, shortness of breath, dizziness, chest pain or nosebleeds, your blood pressure levels are likely at a dangerous or life-threatening stage.[2c, 6b]

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Diagnosis is simple and pain free. So it's important to get your blood pressure checked at least once a year. All you need is a blood pressure measurement taken by a doctor, clinic sister or nurse using an inflatable arm cuff and pressure measuring gauge or stethoscope.

Your blood pressure measurement recording shows two numbers, expressed as systolic blood pressure (SBP) over diastolic blood pressure (DB).

Systolic blood pressure[3c, 5b, 9a]

The top number measures the pressure inside your artery when your heart contracts, or beats and pumps blood through your body. Blood pressure is at its highest or in its peak cycle, which is called systole.

Diastolic blood pressure[3d, 5c, 9b]

The bottom number measures the pressure inside your artery when your heart rests between beats, and refills with blood. The cycle in which your blood pressure falls is called diastole.

