

Quick facts

- Globally, nearly one billion people have high blood pressure (hypertension); of these, two-thirds are in developing countries.
- Hypertension is one of the most important causes of premature death worldwide and the problem is growing; in 2025, an estimated 1.56 billion adults will be living with hypertension.
- Hypertension kills nearly 8 million people every year, worldwide and nearly 1.5 million people each year in the South-East Asia (SEA) Region.
- Approximately one-third of the adult population in the SEA Region has high blood pressure.

What is high blood pressure or hypertension?

- Blood pressure is the force of blood against the artery walls as it circulates through the body. High blood pressure or hypertension is the constant pumping of blood through blood vessels with excessive force.
- Blood pressure is written as two numbers. The first (systolic) number represents the pressure in blood vessels when the heart beats. The second (diastolic) number represents the pressure in the vessels when the heart rests between beats.

Blood Pressure Levels

<i>Normal</i>	<i>Systolic: less than 120 mmHg Diastolic: less than 80 mmHg</i>
<i>At risk (prehypertension)</i>	<i>Systolic: 120–139 mmHg Diastolic: 80–89 mmHg</i>
<i>High</i>	<i>Systolic: 140 mmHg or higher Diastolic: 90 mmHg or higher</i>



What causes hypertension?

- Blood pressure tends to rise as people get older and thus everyone's risk for hypertension increases with age.
- Behaviour and lifestyle-related factors can put people at a higher risk for developing high blood pressure. This includes eating too much salt (sodium), not eating enough potassium (from fruits and vegetables), being overweight, not getting enough exercise, as well as drinking too much alcohol and smoking.
- About 60% of people who have diabetes also have high blood pressure.
- Hypertension can be hereditary. People can inherit genes that make them more likely to develop the condition. The risk for high blood pressure can increase even more when heredity is combined with unhealthy lifestyle choices.

What are the symptoms of hypertension?

- High blood pressure is called the "silent killer" because it often has no warning signs or symptoms, and many people do not realize they have it; that is why it's important to get blood pressure checked regularly.

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- Hypertension is usually without any symptoms, but could give rise to early-morning headache, nosebleed, irregular heartbeats and buzzing in the ears.
- Symptoms of severe hypertension include tiredness, nausea, vomiting, confusion, anxiety, chest pain and muscle tremors.
- The only way to detect high blood pressure is to have it measured by a doctor or a health professional. Measuring blood pressure is quick and painless.

What are the adverse health effects of hypertension?

High blood pressure can cause serious damage to health. It can harden the arteries, decreasing the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart. This reduced flow can cause—

- *chest pain*, also called angina.
- *heart failure*, which occurs when the heart cannot pump enough blood and oxygen to other organs.
- *heart attack*, which occurs when the blood supply to the heart is blocked and heart muscle cells die from lack of oxygen. The longer the blood flow is blocked, the greater the damage to the heart.

High blood pressure can burst or block arteries that supply blood and oxygen to the brain causing *stroke*.

What can be done to prevent and control high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is largely preventable by adopting lifestyle modifications at early stages. Treating hypertension is associated with a reduction in cardiovascular complications. Below is a list of actions to prevent hypertension.

- *Reduce and manage mental stress* through yoga, meditation and other relaxing techniques.
- *Eat a healthy diet* consisting of lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, which provides nutrients such as potassium and fibre.
- *Limit intake of sodium* by reducing the amount of salt added to food. The total daily intake of salt or sodium chloride from all sources should be *no more* than 5 gm per day (1 tea spoon). Be aware that many processed foods are high in sodium. Avoid or reduce “pickles”, “papads”, “chutneys” and soy sauces which are high in sodium.
- *Limit the intake of food high in saturated fats*. Eliminate/reduce trans fats in diet.
- *Maintain a healthy weight*. Being overweight can raise blood pressure. Losing weight can help lower blood pressure.
- *Be physically active*. Physical activity can help lower blood pressure. Adults should engage in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- *Do not use tobacco*. Smoking injures blood vessels and speeds up the hardening of arteries. Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. If not using tobacco, do not start. If already using tobacco, quitting will lower the risk for heart disease and stroke.
- *Limit alcohol use*. Drinking too much alcohol is associated with high blood pressure.
- *Regularly check blood pressure*. Getting blood pressure checked regularly is important because high blood pressure often has no symptoms.
- *Treat high blood pressure*. If a person already has high blood pressure the doctor may prescribe medications in addition to lifestyle changes.
- *Prevent and manage other medical conditions* such as diabetes. About 60% of people who have diabetes also have high blood pressure. Reduce the risk of diabetes by eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight and being physically active. If a person already has diabetes, the doctor may prescribe medications in addition to lifestyle changes.