HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE OR HYPERTENSION?

- Blood pressure is created by the force of blood pushing against the walls of blood vessels (arteries) as it circulates through the body.
- Normally blood pressure rises and falls several times during the day in response to body functions. **High blood pressure or hypertension, is a condition in which the blood vessels have persistently raised pressure.**
- Blood pressure is written as two numbers (measured in millimetres of mercury—mmHg, e.g. 120/80 mmHg). The first (systolic) number represents the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart beats. The second (diastolic) number represents the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart rests between beats.
- Normal levels of both systolic and diastolic blood pressure are particularly important for efficient functioning of vital organs, such as the heart, brain and kidneys, and for overall health and well-being.
- Hypertension is defined as a systolic blood pressure equal to or above 140 mmHg and/or diastolic blood pressure equal to or above 90 mmHg.

**High blood pressure is a Silent Killer with NO warning symptoms**

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

- Behaviour and lifestyle-related factors can put people at a higher risk for developing high blood pressure. This includes eating too much salt (sodium), being overweight and not getting enough exercise, as well as drinking too much alcohol and using tobacco.
- Blood pressure increases with age due to stiffening of blood vessels. Ageing of blood vessels can be slowed down by promoting healthy living including healthy eating and by reducing salt intake in the diet.
- In some cases, there is no known specific cause for high blood pressure. Genetic factors may play a role and a close relative may have a history of high blood pressure. The risk for high blood pressure can increase even more when heredity is combined with unhealthy lifestyle choices.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

- Sometimes high blood pressure can cause symptoms such as headache, shortness of breath, dizziness, chest pain, palpitations of the heart and nose bleeds.
- But most people with high blood pressure usually have NO warning signs or symptoms. Thus many with high blood pressure may not know they have it. That is why it is important to get your blood pressure checked regularly.

HOW IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE DIAGNOSED?

- The only way to detect high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked by a doctor or a health professional. Measuring blood pressure is quick and painless. Blood pressure measurements need to be recorded for several days before a diagnosis of hypertension is made.

**Early detection and management of high blood pressure can help in reducing the risk of heart attack, heart failure, stroke, and kidney failure. All adults should check their blood pressure and know their blood pressure levels.**
WHAT ARE THE ADVERSE HEALTH EFFECTS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

- It is dangerous to ignore high blood pressure, because it increases the risk of life-threatening complications. The higher the blood pressure stays above normal, the higher is the potential for harmful consequences to the heart and blood vessels in major organs such as the brain and kidneys. If left undiagnosed and uncontrolled, high blood pressure can lead to heart attack, an enlargement of the heart, and eventually heart failure. Blood vessels may develop bulges (aneurysm) and weak spots, making them more likely to burst and clog. The pressure in the blood vessels can also cause blood to leak out into the brain. This can cause a stroke. High blood pressure can also lead to kidney failure, blindness, rupture of blood vessels and cognitive impairment.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT AND CONTROL HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

High blood pressure is largely preventable by adopting lifestyle modifications. Below is a list of actions you can take to prevent high blood pressure.

- **Eat a healthy diet** consisting of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, high fibre and low fat.

- **Limit intake of sodium by reducing the amount of salt added to food.** The total daily intake of salt (sodium chloride) from all sources should be no more than 5 grams per day (1 teaspoon). Many processed foods are high in salt. Avoid processed food and reduce consumption of pickles, papads, chutneys and soy sauces, which are high in salt.

- **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 you are not using tobacco, do not start. If you are 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.

- **Check your blood pressure regularly.** Regular blood pressure checks help ensure that high blood pressure is diagnosed and controlled before it leads to serious health problems.

- **Treat high blood pressure.** For some people, lifestyle changes are not enough and prescription medication is needed to control blood pressure. In most cases, control of blood pressure means a systolic blood pressure less than 140 mmHg and a diastolic blood pressure under 90 mmHg.

- **Prevent and manage other medical conditions such as diabetes.** About 60% of people who have diabetes also have high blood pressure. Having both hypertension and diabetes doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease and the risk of dying.

- **Reduce and manage mental stress** through yoga, meditation and other relaxing techniques.