

High blood pressure (hypertension)

Overview

High blood pressure is a common condition that affects the body's arteries. It is also called hypertension. If you have high blood pressure, the force of the blood pushing against the artery walls is consistently too high. The heart must work harder to pump blood.

Blood pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury (mm Hg). In general, hypertension is a blood pressure reading of 130/80 mm Hg or higher.

- **Normal blood pressure.** Blood pressure is lower than 120/80 mm Hg.
- **Elevated blood pressure.** The top number ranges from 120 to 129 mm Hg and the bottom number is below, not above, 80 mm Hg.
- **Stage 1 hypertension.** The top number ranges from 130 to 139 mm Hg or the bottom number is between 80 and 89 mm Hg.
- **Stage 2 hypertension.** The top number is 140 mm Hg or higher or the bottom number is 90 mm Hg or higher.

Symptoms

Most people with high blood pressure have no symptoms, even if blood pressure readings reach dangerously elevated levels. You can have high blood pressure for years without any symptoms.

A few people with high blood pressure may have:

- Headaches
- Shortness of breath
- Nosebleeds

However, these symptoms are not specific. They usually do not occur until high blood pressure has reached a severe or life-threatening stage.

When to see a doctor

Blood pressure screening is an important part of general health care. Ask your provider for a blood pressure reading at least every two years starting at age 18. If you are age 40 or older, or you are 18 to 39 with an elevated risk of high blood pressure, ask for a blood pressure check every year.

Your care provider will recommend more-frequent readings if you have high blood pressure or other risk factors for heart disease.

Children age 3 and older may have blood pressure measured as a part of their yearly checkups.

Causes

Blood pressure is decided by two things: the amount of blood the heart pumps and how hard it is for the blood to move through the arteries. The more blood the heart pumps and the narrower the arteries, the higher the blood pressure.

There are two main types of high blood pressure.

Primary hypertension, also called essential hypertension

For most adults, there is no identifiable cause of high blood pressure. This type of high blood pressure is called primary hypertension or essential hypertension. It tends to develop gradually over many years. Plaque buildup in the arteries, called atherosclerosis, increases the risk of high blood pressure.

Secondary hypertension

This type of high blood pressure is caused by an underlying condition. It tends to appear suddenly and cause higher blood pressure than does primary hypertension. Conditions and medicines that can lead to secondary hypertension include:

- Adrenal gland tumours
- Blood vessel problems present at birth, also called congenital heart defects
- Cough and cold medicines, some pain relievers, birth control pills, and other prescription drugs
- Illegal drugs, such as cocaine and amphetamines
- Kidney disease
- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Thyroid problems

Prevention

Following a healthy lifestyle is considered the best way to keep blood pressure within the recommended range. It can be done as: -

- **Keep your weight healthy.** The higher your body mass index (BMI), the greater your odds of developing high blood pressure.

- **Track your blood pressure.** It is especially important to have it checked often if you are over age 40, overweight, sedentary, or have a family history of heart disease or high blood pressure.
- **Eat heart-healthy foods.** That means a diet high in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and lean protein, and low in sodium and alcohol.
- **Get, or stay, fit.** Being active helps keep weight in check and reduces your odds of many different heart problems.
- **Do not smoke, or, if you do now, quit.** Smoking damages blood vessels.
- **Learn healthy ways to manage stress.** Many people find yoga and meditation to relieve stress.

Home Remedies

1. Garlic

Garlic is one of the most well-known natural remedies for high blood pressure. It has allicin, a compound that helps relax blood vessels and improve blood flow, thereby reducing hypertension.

2. Lemon Water

Lemons are rich in vitamin C and antioxidants, which help in neutralising harmful free radicals. They also make blood vessels soft and flexible, aiding in the reduction of blood pressure. Squeeze half a lemon into a glass of warm water and drink it every morning on an empty stomach.

3. Bananas

Bananas are an excellent source of potassium, a mineral that helps balance sodium levels in the body and regulates blood pressure. Regular consumption of bananas is a simple yet effective high BP treatment.

4. Hibiscus Tea

Hibiscus tea is packed with antioxidants that help lower blood pressure by relaxing blood vessels. Its diuretic properties also aid in flushing out excess sodium from the body. Steep dried hibiscus flowers in hot water for 5–10 minutes and drink 1–2 cups daily.

5. Flaxseeds

Flaxseeds are high in omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to lower blood pressure and improve heart health. They also reduce inflammation, another factor contributing to hypertension.

6. Exercise and Physical Activity

Regular exercise is one of the most effective home remedies to control high BP. Activities like walking, jogging, swimming, or yoga can improve heart health, reduce stress, and lower blood pressure naturally.

7. Reduce Sodium Intake

Excess sodium in the diet is a leading cause of hypertension. Cutting back on salt is one of the simplest and most effective ways to manage high blood pressure.