

# Symptoms of hypertension

## Hypertension is silent

High blood pressure has no symptoms. Hypertension is a silent killer. That is because it does not give any sign. Many people found out they had hypertension for the first time when they had a stroke, eye problems, kidney failure, or heart problems. In such people, hypertension was already discovered when it has caused a lot of damage to the organs. Some people would live the rest of their lives with disabilities caused by these complications of hypertension. These complications could have been avoided if they had known earlier and started treatment.

Some people are aware they have it but do not want to begin treatment due to the fear of the side effects of medications, the cost of treatment, the stigma of having hypertension at a 'young age,' etc. Whatever your fears are, they are valid. But you have to discuss them with your healthcare provider. Some of your fears are based on false or inaccurate information. Your healthcare provider will give you the correct health information to help manage your blood pressure.

The only way to know your BP is elevated is by checking it. No sign or symptom is known to be absolutely due to hypertension. People would go about their daily activities without any idea that their blood pressure is over 180/100mmHg which is grade 2 hypertension. This is a time bomb waiting to detonate. Such a person can suffer a stroke in a twinkling of an eye without warning. They can become blind, suddenly breathless from acute heart failure, or have problems with reasoning, learning, and remembering new information.

You don't have to wait till you fall ill or go to a hospital before you check your BP. You can get an automated BP machine from a pharmacy store and do a self-check from time to time. You can also go to your neighbourhood pharmacy and have it checked by a healthcare provider.

Some persons have the following [symptoms](#) when their BP goes up, indicating damage to the internal organs. Even among the few with symptoms, the symptoms do not show up every time their blood pressure is elevated. You do not have to wait to experience these before checking your BP.

Symptoms include

- Early Morning headaches
- The feeling of ear buzzing
- Blurred vision
- Suddenly bleeding from your nostrils without having picked your nose
- Irregular heartbeat

## How to know if you have hypertension

The ONLY way to find out if you have hypertension is by measuring your blood pressure. Any measurement of 140/90 mmHg and above is higher than normal. Measurement of blood pressure is not painful or difficult. That BP machine is a friend and ally, not a foe. Do not be afraid of using it. Utilise every opportunity you get to check your BP.

## What causes hypertension

### Hypertension risk factors

The causes of hypertension are also called the risk factors for developing hypertension. There are certain risk factors you cannot alter or change. On the other hand, there are risk factors that you can do something to remove, thereby reducing your risk of having high BP.

### Risk factors you can not change

You are more likely to develop hypertension if you have any risk factors. For instance, you cannot change your genes and your race. If you are of African descent, it increases your risk of hypertension. You cannot change your genetic makeup since it is inborn. The risk factors that you cannot change are **non-modifiable**. These include

- Being black/African
- Having a family history of hypertension
- Age greater than 65
- Male gender
- Specific genes that can make one prone to hypertension
- Exposure to adverse conditions as a baby in the womb, such as having a mother who had diabetes or pregnancy-induced hypertension while pregnant with you.

These can increase your risk of hypertension in adulthood.

We do not focus on the things we cannot change but on those we can change. It is a wrong mindset to keep lamenting that most of your family members have hypertension, and you know it will get to you soon. How about you explore ways in which you can avoid it?

### Risk factors you can change

The risk factors that you can do something about, such as not getting regular exercise and cigarette smoking, are the **modifiable risk factors**. Lifestyle changes for hypertension prevention focus on the modifiable risk factors such as

- Being overweight or obese
- Physical inactivity or lack of frequent exercise
- The use of tobacco (either smoking or sniffing)

- Consumption of alcoholic beverage
- Lack of adequate sleep
- Exposure to stressful environmental conditions that lead to resorting to harmful coping styles such as overeating, smoking, or taking alcohol
- Unhealthy diets: These include low consumption of fruits and vegetables, a high-salt diet, and a diet high in saturated fat.
- Environmental exposures such as excessive noise and air pollution

## Howr diet contributes to hypertension

Excessive [sodium](#) consumption can cause a sustained increase in blood pressure. Sodium is a major component of table salt, seasonings, taste enhancers, preservatives and baking soda/powder. Therefore, it is important to check food labels to know the amount of sodium in them. This will help you to avoid them and cut down on sodium intake.

Low potassium intake from diets also causes a rise in BP because potassium does the opposite of what sodium does to blood pressure. It is, therefore, vital to maintain a balance between the intake of sodium and potassium. Foods high in potassium, such as avocados, bananas, fresh tomatoes, and sweet potatoes, can help maintain normal blood pressure.

The [recommended](#) amount of salt in a day is less than a teaspoon of salt. This includes all the salt in food, drinks, and snacks taken within 24 hours.

Here is a list of food items and habits you should pay attention to if you want to reduce sodium in your diet

- Salt

It doesn't matter if it is pink salt, sea salt, Himalayan salt, regular white table salt, or iodinated salt. All salts are high in sodium. Therefore, reduce how much salt you use to the barest minimum. Be mindful of packaged food labels.

High sodium foods include

- Seasoning: This includes both seasoning cubes, powder, or food colourants mixed with seasoning.
- Soy sauce or any liquid seasoning mixture such as fish sauce. Soy Sauce has a very high sodium content as well. Use with caution.
- Any processed food with sprinkled salt after cooking, such as french fries, plantain chips, yam, and potato chips.
- Snacks like crackers and cookies sprinkled with salt.
- Suya and masa sprinkled with salt, seasoning, or both.
- The salt you use to wash your vegetables. When you wash your vegetables in salt water, endeavour to rewash them with clean water and no added salt.

- Pepper sauce: Most pepper sauces added as a side dish to main meals contain salt and seasonings. The server might say it's just pepper to make it more spicy and tasty. Please ask if there is salt or condiment in the mix.
- Suya pepper or yaji and kilishi spice mixture also has high sodium content.
- Plain boiled rice, yam, potato, spaghetti, or macaroni with salt: If you are going to eat any of these with stew, soup, or sauce, then you don't need to boil it with salt. You have enough salt and seasoning in your stew or sauce.

## Weight and blood pressure

Being [overweight](#) or obese increases your risk of hypertension. Weight gain, especially around the tummy, causes an increase in the force that your blood vessels need to channel blood through the body. A diet low in calories and regular physical exercises can help maintain or reduce weight.