

All About High Blood Pressure

Public Information Pamphlets

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Fighting Heart Disease
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ALL ABOUT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

High Blood Pressure is known as the "Silent Killer" many people die or suffer from it without ever knowing that they suffered until a complication develops. 17.99% of the adult Pakistani population suffers from high Blood Pressure and its prevalence rises with age. Over the age of 45 one in 3 persons have high Blood Pressure! High Blood Pressure in an individual can also be present with out any symptoms or warning, 70% of the people suffering from it do not know that they actually have high Blood Pressure and this may very well be you!

Do you know what Blood Pressure and high Blood Pressure mean?

Heart is the strongest muscle in the body; it pumps blood through miles of "arteries" or blood vessels to every part of the body.

Blood Pressure is the force created by the heart as it pushes blood in to these arteries. Each time the heart beats or contracts, blood is pumped out and creates a wave of pressure in the arteries, this is the upper or the "systolic" pressure, when the heart relaxes Blood Pressure goes down, this is the lower or the "diastolic" Blood Pressure. The larger number is placed over the smaller number, e.g. Blood Pressure reads as 120/80 and is read in millimetres of mercury. *All of us have Blood Pressure; we need it to survive!*

There is no clear-cut division between normal and high Blood Pressure in the same way as there is no separation between the people that are tall and those that are of a normal height. Blood Pressure is however dependent upon age to some extent. Arbitrarily for a young person a typical reading might be 120-140 systolic and 80-90

diastolic. There is a tendency for Blood Pressure to rise with age; thus a systolic pressure of 150 would be abnormal in a woman aged 18, but would be perfectly acceptable in someone who is 70.

It is also important to note that Blood Pressure of an individual is not a fixed entity but varies from time to time depending on activity and time of the day. It falls to low levels while you are asleep or resting. On the other hand if you are emotionally stressed and anxious, or if you are engaged in active mental activity it tends to rise.

Do you know what causes high Blood Pressure?

In nine out of ten people suffering from high Blood Pressure a definite cause cannot be found. Most of the people who suffer from High Blood Pressure after the age of 35 fall into this category and this is referred to as 'Essential hypertension'. Hereditary factors however, have a role to play in its causation, so if your parents, brothers or sisters suffer from it your chances would be higher than those that do not have a family history. Other factors that aggravate this hereditary tendency are certain dietary and lifestyle patterns such as being overweight, having sedentary lifestyle, unhealthy eating habits etc. On rare occasions the cause of high Blood Pressure can be identified, and this is usually so in people who suffer from high Blood Pressure at a very young age. The reasons could be diseases of the kidneys or other hormone producing glands in the body.

Sometimes high Blood Pressure is the result of other medication taken. Commonly used tablets for the treatment of aches, pains and "arthritis" can increase Blood Pressure in people who have such a tendency.

How will you get to know if you have high Blood Pressure?

Most people who suffer from high Blood Pressure do not suffer from any symptoms as a result of it, although some suffering from very high Blood Pressure may experience headaches. Headaches however are more common as a result of other causes even in people with High Blood Pressure. Therefore to identify High Blood Pressure there is no substitute to having your Blood Pressure measured. This is particularly true of people approaching middle age when high Blood Pressure becomes more common and for people who have relatives who suffer from high Blood Pressure. It is often convenient to have a measurement during a routine consultation sought for other reasons or to have it measured on request.

Do you know why high Blood Pressure is bad for you?

It has been known for many years that people with untreated high Blood Pressure have greater than normal risk of developing stroke, heart and kidney disease, with a consequent reduction in the life expectancy. High Blood Pressure is the most important known cause of strokes. Someone 40 years old, for instance, is thirty times as likely to have a stroke if his Blood Pressure is high compared to someone with a normal Blood Pressure.

Raised Blood Pressure is one of the few major causes that lead to a Heart Attack. Long standing high Blood Pressure can damage not only the kidneys and the eyes, but it can also lead to heart failure. For these reasons it is very important that Blood Pressure should not only be detected early, but should also be treated effectively.

Do you know of the things in your daily life to lower Blood Pressure?

Because of the intimate relation of high Blood Pressure to Heart Attacks, the dietary and life style advice that applies for the prevention of heart attacks also holds true here.

-Reduce weight: High Blood Pressure is common in people who are overweight, and reduction in weight should always be aimed at as a first measure. Mildly high Blood Pressure is very frequently controlled with the reduction of weight only and no further treatment with medicines is required.

2-Reduce your salt intake: Excessive salt consumption increases Blood Pressure.

Although severe reduction in the salt intake can significantly lower Blood Pressure, it is generally not recommended as such diets are difficult for most people to follow for long periods of time. On the other hand "moderate" salt restriction is more readily achieved. In order to do so you should not use salt on the table over and above the amount that is used in cooking which should also be very small. You should also avoid foods that are salt rich such as meats, pickles, chutneys, and tinned salt treated nuts. Food eaten at restaurants is usually very high in salt and is best avoided.

3-Avoid Stress: Stress, anxiety, emotion and vigorous mental effort can lead to rises in the Blood Pressure. Initially this is transitory, rising with the stressful period only, but with the passage of time permanent changes take place in the blood vessels as a result of which Blood Pressure may be constantly elevated.

4-Control other risk factors: High Blood Pressure leads to Heart Attacks, hence the lifestyle measures aimed at lowering Blood Pressure should be paralleled with a simultaneous effort to reduce other risk factors for Heart Attack. This is a very important aspect of the

treatment and should be considered as important as the control of high Blood Pressure itself.

For details on prevention of a Heart Attack see the Heartfile Public Information Pamphlet on "Prevent a Heart Attack"

Do you know of the commonly used drugs for the treatment of high Blood Pressure?

Different drugs lower Blood Pressure in different ways and there are many medicines used in the treatment of high Blood Pressure, it is not possible to list all the available drugs, some examples are:

- 'Vasodilators' act by relaxing the muscle in the small blood vessels widening their diameter and thus reducing their resistance to Blood flow.
- 'Beta Blockers' act upon the nerves which control the circulation
- 'Diuretics' or Water tablets: cause the kidney to excrete more salt and water. The more recently developed drugs are
- ACE Inhibitors: which antagonise a hormone which increases the Blood Pressure,
- Calcium channel blockers, which cause the vessels to relax.

There are "generic" and "commercial" names for drugs and the same drug (generic) has different (commercial) names as different pharmaceutical companies produce it.

It is however important to realise that treatment of high Blood Pressure is usually lifelong and abruptly discontinuing your blood pressure pill can cause serious problems.

Do you know how often to get your Blood Pressure checked?

Physicians differ on how often to check Blood Pressure. However a person recently diagnosed as having high Blood Pressure should have his or her blood pressure

checked very frequently possibly at the intervals of one week for at least four weeks. Once Blood Pressure is satisfactorily controlled, it can be checked at the intervals of 1-4 months safely.

Do you know whether extra physical activities like sport and driving are good for you or not?

Once your Blood Pressure is controlled there is no objection to driving. However care must be taken during the periods of starting medication as some of the Blood Pressure lowering drugs can cause giddiness if the Blood Pressure falls too much. Once Blood Pressure is controlled and you do not experience any side effects, you can resume driving.

There is no reason to stop your sporting activities if you have high Blood Pressure. The only care you should take is that your Blood Pressure should be reasonably under control, and you should not have started any new medicine recently. An exception to this rule is "Isometric exercise" such as weight lifting, which can cause a rise in the Blood Pressure and is not advisable.

Do you know if an operation will be dangerous for you or not?

If you suffer from high Blood Pressure, but are healthy otherwise and your Blood Pressure is well controlled there is no reason why you cannot have a surgical or a dental operation. But it is important that your doctor and your anaesthetist know about it and your Blood Pressure is well controlled.

Do you know what to do if you forget to take a tablet?

Blood Pressure usually rises gradually once a single pill is missed. Hence if you miss a single pill it will not affect your Blood Pressure very much. In this situation you should not take another one to make up for the missed pill

but take the subsequent dose at the normal time as though you had not forgotten the dose at all.

However some of the uncommonly used drugs for the treatment of high Blood Pressure give rise to rebound high Blood Pressure when they are withdrawn suddenly, It is therefore essential that you discuss with your doctor before stopping any medication.

High Blood Pressure can be controlled in a very easy, safe and cost effective manner. By effective control you can not only enjoy a normal, healthy and active life but also reduce your risk of developing some of the most common and dangerous diseases of middle and late life. Do help yourself and us in the fight against high Blood Pressure

The guidelines described in this booklet are meant for adults and are not intended as a substitute for the advice your doctor may give you based on his knowledge of your particular illness.

Heartfile *Public Information Pamphlets*

No 1 - Prevent a Heart Attack

No 2 - Symptoms of Heart Disease

No 3 - All About High Blood Pressure

No 4 - Smoking and Your Heart

No 5 - Cholesterol and Your Heart

No 6 - Food and Your Heart

Heart disease is one of the biggest killers' world-wide, with a particularly high prevalence in the IndoPak Subcontinent. Heartfile is a non profit organisation fighting heart disease in Pakistan and aims to extend this service to the rest of the developing world. We rely entirely on voluntary contributions to carry out our work and your help in this connection will be greatly appreciated.

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