

Patient Information on Hypertension:

What is hypertension?

Blood pressure is the force generated by the pumping action of the heart that helps the blood to circulate in the body. Hypertension is when the blood pressure is high and the force can hurt the blood vessel walls and affect different organs such as the heart. It is diagnosed when the blood pressure recorded is higher than 140/90 mmHg for adults above 18 years of age. Blood pressure can only be measured using the appropriate sized cuff that will be put on the arm. Blood pressure should be measured after resting for at least five minutes after physical activity, e.g. walking. The provider will likely check the blood pressure two to three times during each appointment on more than two different appointments before making the final diagnosis of hypertension. They may also recommend blood pressure measurement at home and at pharmacies. This is because blood pressure may vary due to different reasons. Blood pressure may be elevated during stress, or after consuming coffee or other stimulants. In some people, blood pressure may increase when they are in hospitals- this is called white coat hypertension.

What are the symptoms of hypertension?

Often, hypertension does not have symptoms. Therefore, all adults need to be checked for it on a regular basis to know if they have hypertension. Generally, it is good to have blood pressure measurements taken once every two years for children under 18 years of age, and once a year for adults. More frequent checkups are advised for individuals with risk factors for hypertension.

What is the importance of checking for high blood pressure?

Hypertension is a major risk factor for heart diseases and stroke. It also affects the kidneys and the eyes. With appropriate treatment and control of the blood pressure, it is possible to prevent the hypertension from affecting these important organs.

What is the cause of hypertension?

In the majority of cases, the cause of hypertension is unknown. Hypertension can be related to kidney diseases, hormonal problems or blood vessel diseases. Hypertension can also occur during pregnancy. There are many risk factors for hypertension. These can include increasing age, family genetics, overweight, being physically inactive, using tobacco, alcohol and too much salt in the diet.

What is the treatment?

The first action is to work on the factors that can lead to hypertension and that can be controlled without the need for medicines. If your provider has prescribed you medicines for any other conditions such as diabetes or high cholesterol, continue to take them regularly. Talk with your

provider about which lifestyle modifications will be best for your hypertension. Some suggestions might include:

- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Limit salt in your food and drinks by avoiding adding table salt on meals.
- Try to eat more fiber, fish, fruits and vegetables.
- Exercise regularly - at least 30 minutes on five days of the week
- Avoid alcohol
- Reduce stress, practice relaxation daily

If the blood pressure is not controlled with the above-mentioned actions, your provider may want you to start blood pressure lowering medicines. There are several types of medicines to control blood pressure. Discuss with your provider which medicines will be best for your condition. One or more types of medicines may be required to control the blood pressure. The choice of medicines depends on the severity of the hypertension, or the presence of other additional conditions such as diabetes, renal disease or heart disease. It is important to take the blood pressure lowering medicines regularly as per the recommendation of your doctor.

How long is the treatment?

The blood pressure lowering medicines help to control the blood pressure. If the medicines are not taken regularly, the blood pressure may increase again. It can be thought of like pressing on a spring (coil). The medicines press down the blood pressure. If the medicines are stopped, the pressure will increase again as a spring will recoil back with removal of pressure.

During regular check-ups, your doctor may decrease, increase or change the medicines depending on the level of your blood pressure, other health problems or side effects of the medicines, but it should not be stopped unless the doctor tells you to do so. Take your medicine even if you feel well or your blood pressure measurement is normal.

What will happen if I take the medicines only when I feel headache?

As explained above, hypertension often does not have symptoms. Just because there are no symptoms does not mean the hypertension has gone away. The presence of symptoms often indicates very high increase in blood pressure and damage to different vital organs (such as the heart and kidneys). Elevated blood pressure even without symptoms is also harmful.