World Hypertension Day

Organized by the World Hypertension League (WHL), an affiliated section of The International Society of Hypertension (ISH), World Hypertension Day (WHD) is celebrated annually on 17 May. In an effort to provide ongoing education to our clients we have put together some informative information regarding this topic.

What is World Hypertension Day?

The WHD was first inaugurated in May 2005 and has become an annual event ever since. The purpose of the WHD is to promote public awareness of hypertension and to encourage citizens of all countries to prevent and control this silent killer, the modern epidemic. World Hypertension Day has been established to highlight the preventable stroke, heart and kidney diseases caused by high blood pressure and to communicate to the public information on prevention, detection and treatment.

Increased blood pressure is the leading risk for death and disability globally as highlighted in the recent global burden of disease study and emphasized by the World Health Organization (WHO) at World Health Day. One of the major barriers to effective control of hypertension is simply that people are not aware their blood pressure is high. Yet simple affordable steps to incorporate routine blood pressure assessment into community programs and workplaces as well as all health care settings could play a major role.

2014 Theme

In 2014, the World Hypertension League (WHL) will initiate the celebrations on Friday May 16th by announcing results of its 2013-2014 campaign to assist national hypertension organizations in developing widespread screening programs to identify those with hypertension. The Campaign ‘Know your blood pressure’ will be repeated annually for the next 5 years to facilitate the development of programs to screen for hypertension.

What is Hypertension?

Hypertension is most commonly known as High Blood Pressure. It is a chronic medical condition in which the blood pressure is elevated. Many people have high blood pressure for years without knowing it. Most of the time, there are no symptoms, but when high blood pressure goes untreated, it damages arteries and vital organs throughout the body. That’s why high blood pressure is often called the “silent killer”.

Hypertension Is A Global Epidemic!

Globally, 9.4 million die every year and 1.5 billion people worldwide suffer because of high blood pressure or hypertension. It is the biggest single risk factor for death worldwide causing heart disease, stroke and kidney disease and diabetes.
About high blood pressure

High blood pressure increases the risk of heart attacks, strokes and kidney failure. If left uncontrolled, high blood pressure can also cause blindness, irregularities of the heartbeat and heart failure.

The risk of developing these complications is higher in the presence of other cardiovascular risk factors such as diabetes. One in three adults worldwide has high blood pressure. The proportion increases with age, from 1 in 10 people in their 20s and 30s to 5 in 10 people in their 50s. Prevalence of high blood pressure is highest in some low-income countries in Africa, with over 40% of adults in many African countries thought to be affected.

1 In 5 adult South Africans have hypertension. Hypertension often remains undetected until it’s too late and accounts for a large proportion of deaths in middle to older aged South Africans. Modern therapy can prevent hypertension related deaths. The Southern African Hypertension Society (SAHS) is committed to eradicating the effects of hypertension in Southern Africa.

However, high blood pressure is both preventable and treatable. In some developed countries, prevention and treatment of the condition, together with other cardiovascular risk factors, has brought about a reduction in deaths from heart disease. The risk of developing high blood pressure can be reduced by:

- reducing salt intake;
- eating a balanced diet;
- avoiding harmful use of alcohol;
- taking regular physical activity;
- maintaining a healthy body weight; and
- avoiding tobacco use.

What is Healthy Blood Pressure?

Know your Blood Pressure

As hypertension and AF are often related, it is good to measure your blood measure regularly at home with an automatic, cuff style bicep (upper arm) monitor.

Look for a blood pressure reading should be below 135 mmHG for the upper reading and below 85 mmHg for the lower reading for good health. When taking your blood pressure remember to do it when you are calm and quiet and at least 30 minutes after exercise. Begin by making sure the cuff fits around your upper arm. Sit with your back straight and don’t cross your feet. Take multiple readings at the same time of day. And of course, record your results for future reference. If you maintain a healthy blood pressure, you will help to maintain a healthy heart rhythm.

What is Healthy Heart Beat?

Know your Rhythm

Do you know whether your heart beat or heart rhythm is normal? You can take your pulse at the same time as when you take your blood pressure. A faster than normal heartbeat is usually greater than 100 beats per minute and sometimes as fast as 150 beats per minute. An irregular heartbeat or rhythm is harder to detect. Symptoms range from feeling an irregular beat in your chest, to tiredness, fainting or absolutely nothing. So, it is best to check with your doctor who can do a simple test for AF.

What is Atrial Fibrillation (AF)?

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is the most common problem when the heart is pumping very irregularly and usually fast. Atrial fibrillation may have no symptoms and only be noticed by feeling the pulse or by a health care professional testing the heart. When the heart is not pumping well, and regularly, blood clots can form in the heart, break free and travel to the brain causing a stroke. AF episodes are usually intermittent, often recurring, and may become permanent.
What is the link between Hypertension and Atrial Fibrillation (AF)?

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is the most common cause or risk factor that may lead to atrial fibrillation (abnormal heart beat). The combination of having atrial fibrillation and hypertension both significantly increases the risk of stroke!

The Best Prescription Is Prevention

Stay active – Always: It may be possible to prevent hypertension and atrial fibrillation by staying physically active. Try light to moderate physical activities such as gardening, walking and housework as these have been shown in studies to be effective.

Eat more fruit and veggies: Eating healthy is always good for you. Begin by eating more fruits and vegetables. Have at least one vegetarian meal a week. Take fruit and nuts in their natural form as a snack. Or eat one fruit or vegetable of every colour, every day.

Decreased fast processed foods: Cut down on foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt. These are mainly found in fast foods, ready to eat packaged foods and restaurant foods. If you cook more meals at home you can control how much fat, sugar and salt you use. And remember, it’s easy to remove the salt shaker from the table.

Limit Alcohol: Drink little or no alcohol.

Stop Smoking: Smoking is major cause of death and disability. If you smoke, plan to stop.

High blood pressure complications

Blood pressure is created by your heart pushing the blood through your arteries and results in resistance created by the walls of your blood vessels. The play between the pressure generated by your heart and the resistance of the blood vessels determines your blood pressure level.

Normal blood pressure is a reading of 120/80mmHg. Readings above that, up to 129/85, are called Pre-Hypertension, which may carry the same risks as established hypertension, but is unlikely to cause organ damage if treated promptly.

A consistent blood pressure reading of 140/90 mmHg or higher is considered high blood pressure, or hypertension, which is the correct medical term. Malignant hypertension is a reading of ≥ 180/110, and is a medical emergency.

Hypertension may be due to an underlying disorder, such as Renal Artery Stenosis, but in the vast majority of cases, no cause is found. This is called Essential hypertension.

High blood pressure is called the silent killer because it usually has no symptoms. Some people may not find out they have it until they have trouble with their heart, brain, or kidneys. This means that that the hypertension has caused damage to these organs, and this may not be reversible.

Hypertension Treatment, Blood Pressure Medications

Many drugs that lower blood pressure also prevent heart attacks and strokes.

Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider for individualized care. And then remember to:

- Take your medications regularly as instructed by your physician
- Most people need more than one medication to control blood pressure
- Report any side effects to your physician
- Continue to monitor blood pressure while on medication
The World Health Organization (WHO) on Hypertension

WHO released a global brief on Hypertension on what they call the Silent Killer and Global Public Health Crisis. The Global brief on hypertension, published on the occasion of World Health Day 2013, describes why, in the early 21st century, hypertension is a global public health issue. It describes how hypertension contributes to the burden of heart disease, stroke and kidney failure and premature death and disability. The document also explains how hypertension is both preventable and treatable and how governments, health workers, civil society, the private sector, families and individuals can join forces to reduce hypertension and its impact.

Download the global brief on hypertension

Hypertension is a Prescribed Minimum Benefit (PMB)

Prescribed minimum benefits (PMBs) are defined by law. They are the minimum level of diagnosis, treatment and care that your medical scheme must cover – and it must pay for your PMB condition/s from its risk pool and in full. There are medical interventions available over and above those prescribed for PMB conditions but your medical scheme may choose not to pay for them. A designated service provider (DSP) is a healthcare provider (e.g. doctor, pharmacist, hospital) that is your medical scheme’s first choice when you need treatment or care for a PMB condition. You can use a non-DSP voluntarily or involuntarily but be aware that when you choose to use a non-DSP, you may have to pay a portion of the bill as a co-payment.


Sources: Health24.com, the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), the South African Hypertension Society, the World Hypertension League and the World Health Organisation (WHO)

In conclusion

Appropriate management of hypertension can enable people to enjoy a good quality of life. Healthcare providers educate patients so that they know what to do when hypertension symptoms flare up. The good news is that there is a lot you can do to treat high blood pressure – although prevention is always better than cure. Besides eating a healthy diet, exercise and stopping smoking, one of the most important things people need to know is that eating too much salt can increase blood pressure. The South African government recently announced that it was taking a leading role in getting people to cut down on salt by introducing groundbreaking salt legislation. This has come about as a result of the national Department of Health recognising the need to lower blood pressure and to save lives by making salt reduction mandatory in the food industry.

The Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) Annual Report for 2012-2013 ranked Hypertension 1st on the list of most prevalent Prescribed Minimum Benefit (PMB) Conditions in medical schemes, 118.8 (114.6 per 1 000 average beneficiaries in 2011). Reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure can be reduced by avoiding tobacco use amongst other. Observe World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) on 31 May. Observed around the world every year on May 31, WNTD is intended to encourage a 24-hour period of abstinence from all forms of tobacco consumption across the globe. Just attempting this action can escort us to most important donation for the disease.

Contact your medical scheme today and find out how they can help you!

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