

Quénet's family pharmacy

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Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (hypertension) is known as the 'silent killer' as there are rarely symptoms or visible signs warning you that your blood pressure is high. In more advanced cases headaches, visual disturbances, nosebleeds, nausea and vomiting, sleepiness and even seizures may be experienced. High blood pressure increases your risk of having a stroke. About 1 in 4 South Africans between the ages of 15 and 64 years suffers from high blood pressure. It is one of the leading causes of heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure and premature death.

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood in arteries that is needed to keep blood flowing through the body. High blood pressure develops if the walls of the larger arteries lose their natural elasticity and become rigid, and the smaller blood vessels become narrower.

A blood pressure measurement is made up of two parts: systolic and diastolic. Systolic pressure (SBP) occurs during heart contraction and diastolic pressure (DBP) during the period of heart relaxation between beats. This is why a measurement is expressed as one figure over another, for example, 140/90 mm Hg (SBP/DBP).

a guide of blood pressure levels:

Normal < 120/80 to 129/84 High Normal 130/85 to 139/89

hypertension:

mild 140/90 to 159/99 - moderate 160/100 to 179/109 - severe >180/110

Have your blood pressure checked once a year (more often if there is a history)!

What harm does high blood pressure do?

An uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to a heart attack, stroke, kidney failure and damage to eyesight (glaucoma, blindness). The increased workload can also weaken the heart and lead to heart failure. Tiredness, shortness of breath and swollen ankles are often experienced. Take all blood pressure medication exactly as prescribed. Don't stop or change it unless advised to do so by your doctor.

Advice for managing high blood pressure

» A high salt intake is linked to high blood pressure - reduce your salt intake to no more than 5g (1 teaspoon) of salt a day

» Make use of fresh and dried herbs, spices, garlic or lemon juice to add flavour to your food, without adding extra salt or salty seasoning

- » Foods like packet soups, stock cubes, gravies, cheese, many breakfast cereals, breads, salty snacks, processed meats and fast foods are very high in salt, so should be used sparingly
- » Enjoy a variety of fruits and vegetables, and aim to have at least 5 servings a day
- » Choose whole grain and high fibre foods
- » Try to include fatty fish (sardines, pilchards, salmon, mackerel) at least twice a week
- » Avoid the harmful use of alcohol, and if you drink alcohol, limit it to no more than 1 drink a day for women and 2 drinks a day for men
- » Quit smoking and avoid second-hand smoke
- » Keep a healthy weight for your height
- » Incorporate regular physical activity into your day (at least 30 minutes five times a week)
- » Limit unhealthy saturated and trans fats, found in fatty and processed meats, chicken skin, full-cream dairy products, butter, ghee, cream and hard cheeses commercially baked goods such as pies, pastries, biscuits and crackers, fast foods and deep-fried potato/slap chips
- » It is better to replace these fats with healthier unsaturated fats such as sunflower / canola / olive oil, soft tub margarine, peanut butter, nuts and seeds, avocado or fish