



## Hypertension – Patient Awareness and Self-Care

### 1. What is blood pressure and high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the pressure exerted by the blood against the walls of the blood vessels. It is represented in terms of the systolic blood pressure over the diastolic blood pressure. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg).

Systolic blood pressure is the maximum pressure on the walls while the heart is beating. A normal systolic blood pressure is 140 mmHg or lower.

Diastolic blood pressure is the minimum pressure on the walls when the heart is resting between beats. A normal diastolic blood pressure is 90 mm Hg or lower.

Blood pressure that always stays above this level is considered high and the person is said to have high blood pressure or hypertension.

### 2. What causes high blood pressure?

In most patients, the cause for high blood pressure is not clear. However, you may be at risk of getting high blood pressure if you:

- are overweight
- have a diet high in salt
- regularly drink large amounts of alcohol
- do not have enough exercise
- are always under stress
- have a family history of high blood pressure
- are 40 years old or older
- have certain medical problems such as kidney disease

### 3. What are the signs and symptoms of high blood pressure?

People with high blood pressure usually feel well and do not have any symptoms. Many people are found to have high blood pressure during routine medical checkups or health screening. If you have not had a medical checkup or health screening in a long while, do make an appointment now.

#### **4. What are the problems of having high blood pressure?**

High blood pressure can be dangerous and can hurt your body in many ways. These include:

- heart attack
- heart failure
- stroke
- kidney failure

#### **5. What can I do to care for myself if I have high blood pressure?**

High blood pressure is a lifelong disease. It can be controlled but not cured. You can help to control your blood pressure by:

- eating wisely
- eating less salt and fat
- cutting down sugar and the amount of calories you take in
- cutting down on the amount of alcohol you take in
- exercising regularly and losing weight
- stopping smoking
- keeping stress under control
- taking your medicines regularly
- keeping up with your doctor's appointment
- checking your blood pressure regularly

#### **6. Why is it important to keep up with my doctor's appointments?**

High blood pressure is a silent killer. It is important for you to follow the plan that your doctor has come up for you. Remember to keep up with your appointments so that your doctor can check on your condition and make any changes to your medical plan when needed.

#### **7. Why is it important to take my high blood pressure medicines regularly?**

High blood pressure medicines work only when it is taken regularly as instructed by your doctor. Do not stop taking your medicines without consulting your doctor first as stopping your medicines can cause a sudden, dangerous increase in your blood pressure.

## 8. Blood pressure monitoring

You can check your blood pressure easily and conveniently at home. There are many blood pressure machines available in the market. Your pharmacist can help you choose one that best suit your needs and advise you on the right ways to take your blood pressure at home.

### How to measure your blood pressure

1. Sit comfortably in a chair with your elbow and forearm resting on a flat surface.
2. Wrap the blood pressure monitor cuff around your upper arm. Make sure that the height of the cuff and your heart is at the same level. You can place a cushion or pillow to adjust your arm to the correct height.
3. Press the "ON" button on the blood pressure monitor and allow the meter to take your blood pressure reading.
4. Check the blood pressure reading from the screen and record the readings in a diary. Make sure you enter the dates when the readings are taken.
5. Show your doctor your blood pressure readings at your next appointment.

### Points to note while taking your blood pressure at home

1. Your blood pressure readings may be higher than normal under the following conditions:
  - After exercising or after activities where you were more physically active
  - After a heavy meal, after drinking coffee or smoking
  - When you are anxious, nervous or upset about something
  - When you are in a hurry
2. Always try to take your blood pressure when you are relaxed or when you have rested for about 15 minutes after any physical activities. Be sure to note down any reason which you think may affect your blood pressure reading.
3. Try to take your blood pressure at around the same time every day as blood pressure readings may be slightly different at different times of the day.
4. Be sure that your blood pressure readings are taken in the correct posture.
5. Different blood pressure machines may give slightly different readings. Therefore it is best to use the same blood pressure machine.
6. Your blood pressure may be slightly different from those taken by your doctor as the environment at home may be different from that in the clinic.