

What is hypertension?

High or raised blood pressure, also known as 'hypertension', is a condition in which the blood vessels have persistently raised pressure, putting them under increased stress.¹

'Normal' blood pressure (BP) is defined as blood pressure of 120 mm Hg when the heart beats (systolic) and a blood pressure of 80 mm Hg when the heart relaxes (diastolic), while 'high' BP is defined as a systolic blood pressure of/above 140mm Hg and a diastolic blood pressure of/above 90mm Hg.¹

However, most people with high BP have no symptoms at all; which is why it is often referred to as the 'silent killer' and why regular check-ups are so important.¹

Effects of hypertension

Hypertension can cause damage to blood vessels in the eyes which can lead to loss of sight.²

The increased workload from high BP can cause the heart to enlarge and render it unable to supply blood efficiently to the body causing heart failure.²

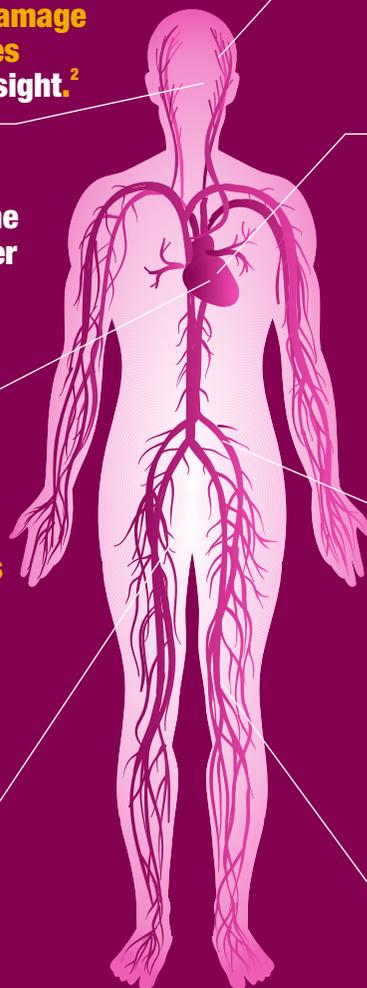
Hypertension can cause the blood vessels leading to the reproductive organs to block or narrow, limiting blood flow which can result in erectile dysfunction in men or lower libido in women.^{2,4}

Uncontrolled hypertension can damage and weaken blood vessels in the brain causing them to narrow, rupture or leak, leading to a stroke.³

Hypertension damages arteries that can become blocked and prevents blood flowing to tissues in the heart muscle which can contribute to a heart attack.²

Hypertension can damage the arteries around the kidneys, disrupting the kidney's ability to filter blood. High BP is one of the most common causes of kidney failure.^{2,3}

Atherosclerosis caused by hypertension can result in a narrowing of arteries in the legs (as well as arms, stomach and head), leading to reduced blood flow and causing pain or fatigue when walking.²



Facts on hypertension in Africa



25%

is the percentage of deaths under 60 that are attributable to hypertension in Africa, compared to 7% in high income countries in 2009.⁵

80 MILLION

is approximately the number of adults with high blood pressure in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2000 and this figure is expected to rise to 150 million by 2025.⁶

46%

is the percentage prevalence of hypertension in Africa, the highest across the World Health Organization regions, with almost half the population affected by it.⁷

<10%

is the estimated percentage of patients who have access to hypertension treatment in some African countries.⁸

The economic and personal burden of hypertension

Hypertension is the number **#1** cause of significant financial burden, including the cost of caring for all the complications arising from it such as stroke, ischemic heart disease and congestive heart failure.⁶

The majority of African countries cannot afford the high costs of treatment for hypertension with many other competing health priorities and limited resources.⁶

Indirect costs from lost productivity caused by disability and premature mortality are also important considerations, as hypertension and its related complications disproportionately affect the economically-productive age groups in Africa.⁹

In low- and middle-income countries, such as those in Africa, many people do not seek treatment for hypertension because it is too expensive; and if they do, households often then spend a substantial share of their income on hospitalisation and care.¹⁰

References

1. World Health Organization (WHO). Q&As on hypertension. 2015. Available at: <http://www.who.int/features/qa/82/en/> Last accessed November 2015.

2. American Heart Association. Health threats from high blood pressure, 2017. Available at: http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/LearnHowHBP harmsYourHealth/Health-Threats-From-High-Blood-Pressure_UCM_002051_Article.jsp#.W0IYdzt97Dd Last accessed April 2017.

3. Mayo Clinic. High blood pressure dangers: hypertension's effects on your body. 2016. Available at: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/art-20045868> Last accessed April 2017.

4. Mayo Clinic. High blood pressure and sex: overcome the challenge. 2015. Available at: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure-and-sex/art-20044209> Last accessed April 2017.

5. World Health Organization (WHO). Global health risks: mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks. 2009. Available at: http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/GlobalHealthRisks_report_full.pdf Last accessed April 2017.

6. van de Vijver S, Akinyi H, Oti S, et al. Status report on hypertension in Africa: consultative review for the 6th session of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Health on NCD's. Pan African Med J. 2013;16:38. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3932118/> Last accessed April 2017.

7. World Health Organization (WHO). Global health observatory (GHO) data: raised blood pressure. Available at: http://www.who.int/gho/ncd/risk_factors/blood_pressure_prevalence_text/en/ Last accessed April 2017.

8. Lloyd-Sherlock P, Minicuci N, Beard J, Ebrahim S, Chatterji S. Hypertension among older adults in low and middle income countries: prevalence, awareness and control. Int J Epidemiol 2014;43:116-28. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/ije/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/ije/dyt215> Last accessed April 2017.

9. Echouffo-Toheugui JB, Kengne AP, Erqou S, Cooper RS. High blood pressure in sub-Saharan Africa: the urgent imperative for prevention and control. J Clin Hypertens (Greenwich). 2015;17:751-5.

10. World Health Organization (WHO). A global brief on hypertension: silent killer, global public health crisis. 2013. Available at: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/79059/1/WHO_DCO_WHD_2013.2_eng.pdf?ua=1 Last accessed April 2017.