

What is Hypertension?

AKA High blood pressure, it is a condition in which the pressure of blood flow in the blood vessels is chronically elevated. With every heart beat, the heart pumps blood through the arteries to the rest of the body. Blood pressure is the force of blood that is pushing up against the walls of the blood vessels.

If the pressure is too high, the heart has to work harder to pump, and this could lead to organ damage and several illnesses such as heart attack, stroke, heart failure, aneurysm, or renal failure. Like air in a balloon, blood fills arteries to a certain capacity – and just as too much air pressure can cause damage to a balloon, too much blood pressure can harm healthy arteries

Blood pressure is measured by two numbers. The normal level for blood pressure is below 120/80, where 120 represents the systolic measurement (pressure during every beat) and 80 represents the diastolic measurement (pressure in between beats). Blood pressure of 140/90 or above on two or more consecutive visits to the doctor is considered hypertension. The goal of treatment is to lower the pressure below 140/90, and even lower in people with diabetes and chronic kidney disease who have a higher risk of stroke and heart attack.

Hypertension may be classified as essential or secondary. Essential hypertension is the term for high blood pressure with no known cause, and accounts for the majority of cases. Secondary hypertension is the term for high blood pressure with a known direct cause, such as kidney disease, tumors, or birth control pills.

Though the cause of hypertension is generally unknown, there are several risk factors that are highly associated with hypertension: smoking, diabetes, obesity, lack of physical activity, high levels of salt intake, increasing age, stress, genetics and kidney disease.

Hypertension is also referred to “the silent killer” because it usually presents with no symptoms and a person feels perfectly fine until end organ damage occurs. Hypertension does not cause problems over days, weeks, or months; rather, it causes problems over many years and can affect your entire body. By adding strain to the blood vessel walls, hypertension makes them more likely to develop a buildup of fat and cholesterol -- also known as "hardening" of the arteries. This, in turn, puts extra strain on your heart as it pumps blood through the narrowed arteries.

Over time, the strain and build up of fat hypertension causes on the heart and blood vessels, can increase the risk of serious health problems, such as heart disease, stroke, heart attack and kidney damage. Therefore, it is very important to be treated for hypertension.