

Keeping your blood pressure in check

Known as the “silent killer”, hypertension can often go undetected for years until irreversible damage has occurred, says senior consultant cardiologist Tan Boon Yew

Associated with an increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, heart failure and end-stage renal disease, hypertension (or high blood pressure) often does not come with obvious symptoms in the early stages. By the time symptoms develop, significant damage to your body would have already occurred. Dr Tan Boon Yew, senior consultant cardiologist from Mount Alvernia Hospital, explains how to manage the condition and why routine health checks are important.

Q Who is more at risk for hypertension and do genes play a significant role?

Risk factors for hypertension include: medical conditions, genetics, or a combination of these. Lifestyle choices such as smoking, being sedentary, excessive alcohol intake, and a diet high in salt, sugar and fats, can also increase the risk.

Pre-existing medical conditions such as an over- or under-active thyroid gland, or diseases affecting the major arteries in the chest or blood vessels supplying the kidneys, can contribute to hypertension. Certain hereditary conditions like polycystic kidney disease can also lead to hypertension, often at a young age.

Based on the 2010 Singapore National Health Survey, the prevalence of hypertension, defined as a blood pressure (BP) of 140/90 mmHg, among Singaporean residents aged 30 to 69 was 23.5 per cent. As the lifetime risk of hypertension increases with age, this is of particular concern for our rapidly ageing population. A 45-year-old Chinese adult without hypertension for example, has an 84.1 per cent chance of developing hypertension over the next 40 years as he ages¹.

Q Is hypertension reversible and what can I do to manage it?

Early detection and intervention in the form of routine health check-ups, including blood pressure monitoring, is essential and should be performed annually for all adults. For those with chronic conditions such as



Regular check-ups are important to detect hypertension early as the condition often does not show symptoms at the start. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

diabetes, these check-ups should be performed even more frequently.

For patients with hypertension and who are overweight, losing that extra weight is helpful. For every kilogram lost, you can expect a systolic BP reduction of about 1 mmHg. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat and reduced saturated fat can help lower systolic BP by up to 11 mmHg. Further, a diet that is low in sodium and high in potassium, together with regular physical activity, can help reduce BP as well.

Q What sort of treatment should I expect to undergo for hypertension?

Once a doctor has confirmed your hypertension diagnosis, the implementation of lifestyle and dietary interventions mentioned above are essential. In most patients, drug treatment is often necessary to help achieve a desirable BP of under 130/80 mmHg while undergoing treatment.

Depending on the severity of your hypertension, two or more drugs may be necessary before your condition is well-controlled. The aim is to achieve optimal BP control within three months of diagnosis.

Should your doctor suspect a secondary cause of your hypertension, or if it remains poorly controlled despite receiving optimal drug therapy for six months or longer, you may be referred to an appropriate specialist for further evaluation and management.

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21502561>



Dr Tan Boon Yew

Senior Consultant Cardiologist
Restore Heart Centre
Medical Centre D #07-52
Mount Alvernia Hospital