

# Hypertension can be a Silent Killer

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- Dr Shreni Sunil Navalgi

### Case Vignette

A 65-year-old businessman gets up in the early hours of morning and finds out he is not able to move his left hand and leg. His wife rushes him to nearest hospital where they find out that his blood pressures are very high, 190/110 mm of Hg and the CT Head scan done as urgent, shows bleeding in the brain, which has caused an acute stroke or paralysis.

They never knew he had a high blood pressure as they were busy in the daily routine and he was never symptomatic, and fatigue and exhaustion were related to heavy work at workplace.

Regular periodic monitoring will help detecting it early and avoid complications. More so in persons with family history of hypertension, stressful jobs, habits like smoking, excess alcohol and in female related to pregnancy, menopause, thyroid disease silent kidney failure or in some congenital cases.

### What is Hypertension?

**1** High Blood Pressure is a trait (a state) as opposed to a specific disease. It represents a quantitative rather than a qualitative deviation from normal. Any definition of hypertension is therefore an *arbitrary* one. A practical definition is "The level of blood pressure at which the benefits of treatment outweigh the costs and hazards". Your regular family physician is the person for you to advice and get Blood Pressure recorded regularly.

Pre-Hypertension (high normal) is not 'normal' but is predictive of future hypertension and carry many risks associated with hypertension. In addition include in the measurements; risk factors, Target Organ Damage (TOD) presence or absence.

Hypertension is the condition when there is blood pressure recorded at two **2** clinic visits is consistently higher than normal range for that age. In adults the normal blood pressure is LESS or **2** EQUAL to around 120/80 mm of Hg. In older adults aged 60 years or over, it is LESS or EQUAL to 150/90 mm of Hg. This is only simplified for the sake of understanding. These are based on guidelines issued and ideally discuss with your Doctor. **2** patients with co-morbid conditions like chronic kidney disease and diabetes it is LESS or EQUAL to 130/80 mm of Hg.

Over 70% of Indian older adults seemed to living with the chronic conditions like hypertension, diabetes, stroke or heart disease.

### **What Steps must be taken to early detection of High Blood Pressure? What are the complications of late detection?**

<sup>4</sup> High Blood pressure or hypertension can be silent killer. Most often the high blood pressure may not give early warning signs or bodily symptoms to help detect early. Unfortunately, it comes to light in Emergency Department when they are assessed for possible stroke (blood clots in brain) or Myocardial Infarction (Heart Attack). Hence when you are old, pay regular visits to your family Doctor, get your Blood Pressure recorded at each visit, and where possible, self-monitoring of Blood Pressure can reduce morbidity and mortality, meaning it can save lives.

### **How common is Hypertension?**

Studies have shown 20-25% of elderly people who have high BP, either don't take medications at all or take it occasionally. They need to understand the impact of non-treatment or partial treatment, and must make it a habit of taking pills regularly and that is the key to hypertension management.

### **What are the complications of uncontrolled High Blood Pressure for long time?**

Heart: Can cause heart attack, heart failure, irregular heart.

Brain: Stroke and depending on the area affected loss of vision etc.

Eyes: bleeding, Loss of vision.

Kidneys: It may slowly go into kidney failure over a period of time unless regularly checked. If not detected early, some people with the condition may land up with regular dialysis, renal transplant.

### **What are the tests that may be advised if I have recent high Blood Pressure?**

<sup>5</sup> Physician may request the following Blood Tests: Complete Blood Count, Liver Function Test, Renal Function Test, rule out diabetes, serum electrolytes and Urine tests. ECG and Echocardiography. Chest X-ray (enlarged heart, heart failure, etc). These help to find out if there are any particular detectable causes of hypertension or its complications to manage holistically.

### **How is Hypertension treated?**

Lifestyle Management (LSM) becomes an “**indispensable part**” of the management. LSM warranted before initiating anti-hypertensive treatment for

most patients. LSM advisory include change in the eating habit, cut down on salt (bread, breakfast cereals are high in salt), do exercise, stop smoking, and reduce alcohol to one drink per day for female and two drinks per day for male.

Your doctor will decide on drug treatment viz diuretics, Calcium channel blockers, beta blockers or others.

#### **How does the Blood Pressure Tablets work?**

Depends on its mechanism by decreasing sodium content, effect on the heart. Dilatation of blood vessels improves heart function. Some act on the kidney by converting or blocking relevant enzymes. Some may need anxiety reduction tablets. Sometimes the drugs may be combined to address more than one mechanism. Choice will be on individual basis, best discussed with your Doctor.

#### **What are the Adverse Effects of Antihypertensive Medications?**

Frequent monitoring will help in reducing side effects of the drugs. E.g., Sudden lowering of BP may cause giddiness, falls, increase or decrease in heart rate, swelling of the lower limbs. As some patients have other associated diseases they may also interfere with their control.

#### **Should I tell other Doctors about my High Blood Pressure?**

It is necessary to inform other doctors whenever you need their help. This will help them to know if there is any complications and help them prescribe additional tests necessary and coordinate the medications. More important when you go for surgery or any other medical procedure including dental procedures.

#### **I am having High Blood Pressure for 25 years & should I stop medication?**

Medication is never stopped. Your BP is under control because you are taking medicine and if you stop it will have a rebound effect. 3 or 6 monthly review by your doctor will help in good control. Discuss with your family Physician.

#### **My husband has high blood Pressure for 20 years, and is forgetting to take medications. What should I do?**

You have to design your own method to ensure regularity by frequent reminders, use of container in which you can load the tablet and keep in the dinning table. You can regularly check the remaining tablets in the container so that you can see how many he has not consumed. Also check the correct label, date of expiry of the drugs.

### **Misconceptions vs Reality:**

1. *Hypertension is not a big deal as they don't feel symptoms mostly*  
Not true. Silently, high blood pressure damages kidneys, heart, eyes and nerves. Hence consult Doctor and monitor Blood pressure regularly.
2. *Hypertension or its complications cannot be prevented*  
Not true. Early diagnosis and treatment along with lifestyle changes can help in controlling high blood pressure.
3. *Treatment is difficult, once started on treatment we have to take it life long, so I shall postpone starting medicines!*  
Don't do it. Please consult your Doctor. Understand that High Blood Pressure doesn't have symptoms hence we will know only when it has caused damage. So please check BP regularly and take medicines as per Doctor's advice.
4. *Sometimes BP is recorded normal, so I am cured and stop medications on my own.*  
Don't do it. You need to consult your Doctor before stopping treatment. Never stop on your own.

You can follow strict diets, exercise adequately and can reduce stress, and thus age healthily. Once you are 60 years and above and have been found be newly hypertensive, remember one thing that you may not have any symptoms, but still your Blood Pressures could be high enough to damage your organs. Hence understand it is important to monitor BP, ideally home blood pressure monitoring is advised and frequent doctor visits are a necessity.

### **Advisory**

- Weekly Recording of Blood Pressure
- Follow low salt, low fat low carbohydrate diet.
- Reduce saturated fat to no more than 6% of daily calories and total fat to 27% of daily calories.
- Initially Add a vegetable or fruit serving at lunch and dinner, reduce oils and fats to half of what you are using now. Meat should be consumed as one meal of the day.
- Regular brisk walk for half an hour can help to reduce blood pressure.
- maintain a diary of blood pressure readings and take it to your doctor when you visit. Do not stop medications on your own.
- The above will help you to avoid sudden hypertension related complications like stroke, heart attack, kidney failure etc.

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