

Beat High Blood Pressure with Awareness and Action

Kuala Lumpur – It's the silent killer. High blood pressure usually has no warning signs but simple steps can cut your risk of devastating health problems, Manulife and the World Heart Federation said on Thursday to mark World Hypertension Day.

In Malaysia, about 22% of adults have elevated blood pressure.

Awareness is the start. Hypertension is one of the main risk factors for heart disease and stroke – the world's leading causes of death – but many people do not realize their blood pressure is high.

"See your doctor to get your blood pressure checked," said Dr. David Wood, President of the World Heart Federation. "It's quick and painless but it could save your life because high blood pressure can be treated and prevented – often by making a few changes to your diet, activity levels and unhealthy habits."

Various factors contribute to the risk but high blood pressure does not ignore people based on age, affluence, gender or geography. Globally, about one in four adults has hypertension and it's expected to affect more than 1.5 billion people by 2025, according to The Lancet medical journal.

Here are some ways to lower your blood pressure:

- Stay active: Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity five times a week. Walk, dance, swim, do housework or play a sport – they all count
- Eat well: Cut down on salt, sugar, fat and processed foods. Eat at least five portions (handfuls) of fruit and vegetables every day. If you drink alcohol, reduce the amount
- Stop smoking: Quitting tobacco is the single best thing you can do to improve your heart health
- Control your weight: Being overweight or obese raises your risk of high blood pressure

The costs of ignoring hypertension are not just personal. Hospital treatment, medication and lost work hours all add to the burdens on the economy and society.

In Asia, home to half of the world's population, the prevalence of elevated blood pressure ranges from highs of about 31% in Mongolia, 27% in Nepal, 25% in India and 24% in Cambodia to lows of 11% in South Korea, 14% in Singapore, 15% in Australia and 17% in Japan.

In China, more than 19% of adults have elevated blood pressure, with Indonesia at nearly 24%, Vietnam above 23%, the Philippines at nearly 23% and Thailand above 22%. These rates compare with about 13% in the United States and Canada and about 15% in the United Kingdom.

"Hypertension is a serious issue for millions of people across the markets we serve in Asia," said Mark O'Dell, Group CEO of Manulife Malaysia. "As a major life insurer we want to help people live better lives. So we're delighted to team up with the World Heart Federation and help more people take steps towards a healthier lifestyle."

Know Your Numbers

Two measurements assess blood pressure – systolic (maximum) and diastolic (minimum) – often expressed as maximum/minimum. Blood pressure categories are:

Normal: Maximum less than 120 and minimum less than 80

Prehypertension: Maximum 120 to 139 or minimum 80 to 89

High: Maximum over 140 or minimum more than 90

Emergency: Maximum above 180 or minimum above 110 requires immediate medical attention

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