

Essential Hypertension

HYPERTENSION is one of the most common diseases, with WHO estimates of approximately 600 million affected people worldwide. The prevalence rate is higher in the developed world. It is considered to be the most important modifiable risk factor for coronary heart disease, stroke, congestive heart failure, end-stage renal disease, and peripheral vascular disease. Hypertension is generally defined as chronically elevated blood pressure: greater than or equal to 140 mm Hg systolic pressure and/or greater than or equal to 90 mm Hg diastolic pressure. However, of late people with blood pressures of 140-159/90-99 have been designated as prehypertensive, with an increased risk for progression to hypertension. Hypertension is nicknamed the 'silent killer', because most often, it shows no clinical signs and symptoms, and most patients are unaware of their hypertensive state.

Primary or essential hypertension is a medical condition characterized by blood pressure that is consistently higher than normal when no cause for the high blood pressure can be found. As mentioned earlier, the condition is usually asymptomatic. Only in advanced stages of the condition may headaches, nosebleeds and dizziness be encountered. The risk of developing hypertension increases with age. Besides, women over 60 years of age have a higher chance of being hypertensive. If left untreated, hypertension can lead to serious complications like causing damage to the arteries, heart failure, blockage or rupture of blood vessels in major organs like the brain and kidneys, eye damage, etc.

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In 1997, the National Epidemiological Study of Hypertension in the United Arab Emirates (NESH-UAE) project was initiated to understand the extent of prevalence of hypertension in the country. A total of 8,820 UAE citizens were



surveyed, and the overall prevalence of hypertension was found to be 33.1%⁽¹⁾. Other surveys in the UAE also rate the prevalence of hypertension to be around

36% (Ministry of Health data). These preliminary studies are important indications of the high prevalence of hypertension in the United Arab Emirates and stress the importance to initiate a nation-wide effort to prevent and con-

trol high blood pressure in the population, especially since the prevalence rates are indicative of one of the highest in the world. Studies in Tunisia show that the frequency of hypertension is 29.8 % in the country, and is tending to increase with age in both sexes⁽¹⁾. Similar epidemiological surveys in Saudi Arabia have showed that 22 to 28% of the Saudi population is hypertensive⁽¹⁾. A study on school children between the ages of 5 and 13 in Kuwait revealed that 6.8% of the children were hypertensive⁽²⁾. In Egypt, studies have shown the overall prevalence rates at 26.3%⁽³⁾. The prevalence of ▶▶