



Understanding Hypertension

What to note

1

Although the burden of disease in Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be dominated by communicable diseases (**63%**), as more Africans avoid or survive these communicable diseases, **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** are becoming a principal health risk (**37%**).

Non-communicable diseases are **non-infectious** health conditions that cannot be spread from person to person.

NCDs tend to be of long duration, are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behavioural factors, result in long-term health consequences and often create a need for long-term treatment and care.

2

According to the WHO, NCDs kill **41 million** people each year with **77%** of all NCD deaths occurring in low and middle-income countries such as those in Africa.

Human loss across Africa from NCDs remains significant – estimates suggest that NCDs and mental health conditions caused over **2.1 million** premature deaths (**<70 years**) and over **204 million** disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) across Africa in 2019.

Four groups of diseases account for over **80%** of all premature NCD deaths globally:

- i. Cardiovascular diseases - **17.9 million** people annually
- ii. Cancer - **9.3 million** people annually
- iii. Respiratory diseases - **4.1 million** people annually
- iv. Diabetes - **1.5 million** people annually

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Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) stand out as the leading cause of death globally with **three-quarters** of all CVD deaths taking place in low- and middle-income countries.

Hypertension is the CVD with the highest prevalence across Africa (**27%**).

Also known as **high blood pressure**, hypertension is blood pressure that is higher than normal. Your blood pressure changes throughout the day based on your activities. Having blood pressure measures consistently above normal may result in a diagnosis of hypertension.

If not properly managed, it can lead to **severe health complications** and **increases the risk** of heart disease, stroke and sometimes death

Hypertension usually has **no warning signs or symptoms** and many people do not know they have it.

Measuring your blood pressure is the **only** way to know whether you have hypertension.

4

We can lower our blood pressures into a healthy range **or** keep our numbers within a healthy range by making **lifestyle changes**

Prevention

- Reducing salt intake
- Eating more fruit and vegetables
- Being physically active regularly
- Avoiding smoking
- Reducing alcohol consumption
- Limiting the intake of foods high in saturated fats

Management

- Reducing and managing stress
- Regularly checking blood pressure
- Treating blood pressure
- Managing other medical conditions

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NCDs are captured in the Sustainable Development Goals (**3.4**) of the United Nations – the goal is to reduce, by **one-third** premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment.

Tackling NCDs calls for a partnership approach to enable stakeholders to collaborate towards building up relevant data & research, driving advocacy and generating the necessary funding at the national, regional and global levels required to fight these diseases.

References

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