

World Hypertension Day

Measure your blood pressure accurately, control it, live longer!

11 May 2023

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a condition which generally has no symptoms and if left untreated, can lead to heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, kidney failure and blindness.

Risk factors include older age, overweight or obesity, lack of physical activity, high salt/sodium intake, and high alcohol intake.

Hypertension affects around 1 in 6 adults in the Americas and is the main risk factor for cardiovascular diseases, which are the leading cause of death in the region, responsible for around 2 million lives lost each year.

Situation in the Americas

- Hypertension rates vary between countries and subregions. The highest rates are seen in the English-speaking Caribbean subregion (25% of adults).
- Prevalence of hypertension is slightly higher among men (37.6%) than women (33%).

Risk factors for hypertension:

Modifiable risk factors for hypertension include:

- High sodium (salt) intake – In the Americas, adults consume around 8.5g of salt per day, 1.7 times more than the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended levels (<5g per day).
- Overweight and obesity – Around 62.5% of people in the Americas are overweight or obese, the highest of all WHO regions.
- Physical inactivity – the Americas ranks as the least active of the six WHO regions.

Challenges:

Hypertension often presents with no signs nor symptoms and therefore is **frequently undiagnosed and untreated.**

- In the Americas, among adults aged 30 to 79 years, a third of men (33%) and a quarter of women (25%) with hypertension, are unaware of their condition.
- Only 60% of adults with hypertension are treated, a figure that is higher among women (67%) than men (54%).
- Of those who receive treatment, only around a third of adults (30-79 years of age) have their hypertension under control (36%).

COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, management of hypertension was further complicated due to disruptions in the provision of essential health services. Many persons were reluctant to seek care due to the increased risk of contracting COVID-19.

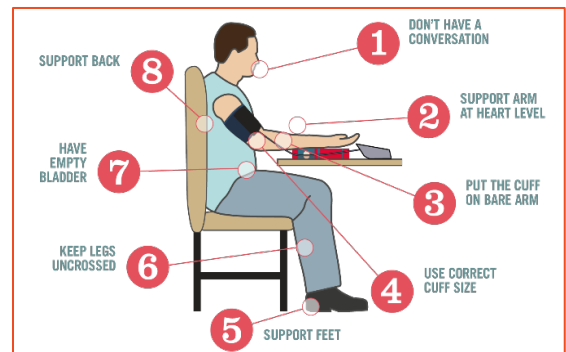
In the Americas, only 12 out of 35 countries reported well-functioning outpatient services for patients with non-communicable diseases¹. The latest Global Pulse Survey on continuity of essential health services showed persisting disruptions at the end of 2022².

PAHO's response:

Lifestyle changes and lifelong use of antihypertensive medications are key to reducing and controlling hypertension.

PAHO works with Member States and civil society organizations on the implementation of evidence-based policies to reduce the risk factors for hypertension through weight reduction, increased physical activity, healthy diets rich in fruit and vegetables, reduced alcohol consumption as well as cessation of tobacco use.

Requirements for obtaining an accurate blood pressure reading.



Additionally, PAHO supports countries in the establishment of regulatory interventions to reduce consumption of unhealthy food products, through the use of front-of-package warning labels (FOPL) on foods high in salt, sugar, and trans-fat.

¹ Luciani S, Caixeta R, Chavez C, et al. What is the NCD service capacity and disruptions due to COVID-19? Results from the WHO noncommunicable disease country capacity survey in the Americas region. *BMJ Open* 2023;13:e070085. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2022-070085. Available at <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/13/3/e070085.full.pdf>

² Fourth round of the global pulse survey on continuity of essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic:

November 2022–January 2023: interim report, 1 May 2023. Available at <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/367352>

To date, eight countries in the Region have implemented nutritional warning labels: (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela).

To reduce the risk factors for hypertension and improve blood pressure management and control, PAHO/WHO also recommends the following:

HEARTS in the Americas

The [HEARTS initiative](#), which PAHO has been coordinating in the Americas since 2017, is a model of care for cardiovascular risk management, with an emphasis on the control of hypertension and the prevention of cardiovascular diseases. It aims to improve the detection, treatment and control of hypertension, and other chronic conditions, in primary health care settings.

The initiative is currently being implemented in over 3000 primary healthcare facilities in 32 countries and territories of the Region.

HEARTS Technical pillars



SHAKE package.

The WHO SHAKE technical package consists of five recommendations that countries can implement to reduce salt consumption at the population level:

- Lower sodium content in food products.
- Implement front-of-package warning labels to help consumers select food products with lower sodium content.
- Implementation of mass media campaigns to alter consumer behavior regarding high sodium consumption.
- Implementing public food procurement and service policies to reduce sodium content in food served and sold.
- Monitoring salt intake and salt content of foods.

In the Americas, 11 countries have a national policy commitment to reduce sodium content in food products (Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay, USA).³

PAHO Strategic Fund

The PAHO Strategic Fund, a pooled procurement mechanism for the Americas, provides access to medications for hypertension as well as clinically validated blood pressure measurement devices at competitive prices, enabling participating Member States to make purchases at significantly reduced costs. This in turn increases access to diagnosis and treatment in the Region.

World Hypertension Day



World Hypertension Day is observed every May 17th to raise awareness of the importance of hypertension prevention, detection, and control. The theme of the day this year is – Measure your blood pressure accurately, Control it, Live Longer.

PAHO is calling on countries to do the following:

- Implement proven measures to reduce salt consumption and promote healthy diets and physical activity and maintain a healthy weight.

³ Mapping Dietary Salt/Sodium Reduction Policies and Initiatives in the Region of the Americas
https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/55056/9789275123232_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

- Strengthen primary health care services to increase the number of people with hypertension who are diagnosed, treated and controlled.

It is also crucial that people are actively engaged in self-care, which includes measuring their blood pressure, being physically active, following a healthy diet, and reducing alcohol consumption.

If the control of hypertension could be increased from current levels (36%) to 50%, an estimated 420,000 deaths due to cardiovascular disease could be averted in the Region annually.

Resources

- [HEARTS in the Americas](#)
- [Blood pressure measurement](#)
- [Cardiovascular Risk Calculator App](#)
- [Salt reduction](#)
- [Trans-fatty Acids](#)
- [Front-of-package labeling](#)