



What you need to know about...

Pulmonary Hypertension

Pulmonary arteries carry blood from your heart to your lungs to pick up oxygen. Pulmonary hypertension means there is increased pressure in your pulmonary arteries. As the pressure builds, your heart must work harder to pump blood through your arteries to your lungs, eventually causing your heart muscle to weaken and sometimes fail.

What causes pulmonary hypertension (PH)?

PH can be caused by changes in the arteries, which make it hard for the heart to push blood through the arteries into the lungs. These changes include: the walls of the arteries tightening; the walls of the arteries stiffening; or blood clots forming in the arteries. There are 5 different groups of PH that are organized based on the cause.

What are the signs and symptoms PH?

General signs and symptoms of PH include:

- shortness of breath during everyday activity
- racing heartbeat
- tiredness
- chest pain
- lightheadedness
- fainting
- swelling in legs and ankles
- bluish color on lips and skin

Who is at risk for developing PH?

Anyone can develop pulmonary hypertension. PH can occur at any age, but it usually develops between the ages of 20 and 60. People who are at increased risk for PH include:

- people with a family history of the condition
- people with heart and lung disease, liver disease, HIV, or blood clots in pulmonary arteries
- people who use certain diet medicines or street drugs

How is PH diagnosed?

PH can develop very slowly. It is possible to go years without diagnosis because the disease has no early symptoms. Your health care provider will diagnose PH using medical and family histories, a physical exam, and other tests to determine the pressure in your pulmonary arteries. These tests may include echocardiography (which creates a picture of your heart), a chest x-ray, an electrocardiogram (or EKG, which shows how fast your heart is beating) or right heart catheterization (which measures pressure in arteries). Exercise testing is used to find out how severe your PH is.

How is PH treated and managed?

Pulmonary hypertension has no cure, but treatment with medicines to relax the blood vessels in the lungs, procedures such as lung transplants and blood vessel dilation, and various oxygen therapies may help relieve symptoms and slow the progress of the disease.

To manage PH, it is important to follow the treatment plan for as recommended by your health care provider and contact your provider if you have new symptoms. Other suggestions include:

- Check with your health care provider before using over-the-counter medicines.
- Track your weight. If you notice rapid weight change, call your health care provider immediately.
- Women should talk to their health care provider about using birth control. Pregnancy can be risky for women who have PH.
- Don't smoke.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Participate in physical activity, but talk to your health care provider about types of activity that are safe for you.