



Pulmonary Hypertension

Pulmonary arteries carry blood from the heart to the lungs to pick up oxygen. When pressure increases in the arteries, it's called pulmonary hypertension (PH). PH is a health concern because as the pressure builds, your heart must work harder to pump blood through your arteries to your lungs, causing your heart muscle to weaken over time and sometimes fail.

What causes pulmonary hypertension?

PH can be caused by changes in the arteries, a tightening or stiffening of the arterial walls or blood clots. PH is classified into five categories based on the causes, which include heart or lung disease, sarcoidosis, sleep-disordered breathing and others. One classification, pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH), refers to high blood pressure in the pulmonary arteries from diseases that affect the small vessels of the lung. PAH can be hereditary, idiopathic (cause unknown) or associated with another disease or condition.

What are the signs and symptoms PH?

Signs and symptoms of PH include:

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

Who is at risk for developing PH?

Anyone can develop PH, and it usually develops between the ages of 20 and 60. People who have an increased risk for PH include:

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

How is PH diagnosed?

PH has few early symptoms and can develop very slowly, so it is possible to go years without a diagnosis. A 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 EKG (which shows how fast your heart is beating) or right heart catheterization (which measures pressure in arteries). Exercise testing shows how severe PH is.

How is PH treated?

Pulmonary hypertension has no cure, but can be treated with medicines that relax the blood vessels in the lungs. Procedures such as various oxygen therapies, blood vessel dilation and lung transplants may help relieve symptoms and slow the progression of the disease.

How can I manage my PH?

To manage PH, it is important to follow the treatment plan recommended by your health care provider, and contact your provider if you have new symptoms. Also be sure to:

- Participate in physical activity that a health care provider recommends as safe for you.
- Don't smoke.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Track your weight. If you notice rapid weight change, call your health care provider.
- Check with your health care provider before using over-the-counter medicines.
- Talk to your health care provider before considering pregnancy, as giving birth can be high risk for women who have PH.