



## Blood pressure cases 'to top 1bn'

**High blood pressure is out of control around the world, with the number of sufferers expected to exceed a billion within 20 years, experts warn.** One in four adults already has the condition, which increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and death.

But unhealthy modern lifestyles mean the toll could hit 1.56 billion by 2025, up from 972 million in 2000, The Lancet medical journal reports. The biggest problem is poor compliance with treatment, an editorial claims.

### Time bomb

Despite very effective and cost-effective treatments, target blood pressure levels are very rarely reached, even in countries where cost of medication is not an issue, says the editorial.

"Many patients still believe that hypertension is a disease that can be cured, and stop or reduce medication when blood pressure levels fall. Physicians need to convey the message that hypertension is the first, and easily measurable, irreversible sign that many organs in the body are under attack.

"Perhaps this message will make people think more carefully about the consequences of an unhealthy lifestyle and give preventative measures a real chance," it says.

Currently, a person in the Western world has a greater than 90% lifetime risk of developing high blood pressure or hypertension.

But lifestyle factors, such as physical inactivity, a salt-rich diet with high processed and fatty foods, and alcohol and tobacco use, mean the problem is spreading at an alarming rate from developed countries to emerging economies, such as India and China, says The Lancet.

Professor Gareth Beevers of the Blood Pressure Association said: "This shows that high blood pressure is a ticking time bomb and should be taken seriously. This is preventable, if people of all ages start looking at their lifestyles and start taking the right action to reduce their risk."

### Prevention

Dr Isabel Lee, of The Stroke Association, said: "Every five minutes someone in the UK has a stroke - that's 150,000 every year. Yet, over 40% of these strokes could be prevented by the control of high blood pressure.

"Whilst it is important to get your blood pressure measured regularly, it is equally important that people who are prescribed blood pressure medication continue to take it even once their blood pressure is back under control.

"GPs need to ensure that patients are made fully aware of the importance of continuing with their blood pressure medication."

People can also take additional steps to help improve their lifestyles and reduce their risk of high blood pressure by stopping smoking, having a healthy diet and exercising regularly, she said.

A British Heart Foundation spokeswoman said high blood pressure often remained undiagnosed until a person encountered something as serious, and potentially fatal, as a heart attack or stroke. "That's why it's vital that people know what their blood pressure is and how they can reduce it if it is high. "Everyone over 40 years of age should talk to their GP or practice nurse about having a full risk assessment for heart and circulatory disease carried out."

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