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## HEALTH BYTES

### Hypertension myth busters

Think of three people you know. At least one of them has high blood pressure (hypertension). Often called 'the silent killer' because it has no obvious symptoms, hypertension can lead to serious health issues, including blindness, stroke and heart attack.

Let's look at some myths around hypertension.

#### Myth: I feel fine, so I don't have hypertension

**Fact:** There's a reason why it's called 'the silent killer'. You may feel absolutely fine; but your blood pressure could be very high. Get your numbers checked regularly – any clinic and many pharmacies can do a quick check for free.

The ideal blood pressure for healthy adults is between 90/60 and 120/80. The higher number is the pressure when your heart beats; the lower one is when your heart rests.

#### Myth: It only affects older, overweight and stressed people

**Fact:** Anyone can develop hypertension, including young, fit people – even children.

#### Myth: I don't add salt to my food, so I don't need to worry

**Fact:** Most of our sodium (the mineral in salt that can push up blood pressure) doesn't come from adding salt to your food. It's found in your favourite take-away meals and everyday items such as bread, tinned food, cheese and even sweets.

The maximum daily allowance of salt is around one teaspoon (5g). Most South Africans eat double that. Read labels carefully, cut down on processed foods and season meals with herbs and spices instead of salt.

#### Myth: It runs in my family so there's nothing I can do

**Fact:** Yes, your family's medical history plays a role, but your lifestyle choices have a massive impact. Eating well, staying active, maintaining a healthy weight, reducing stress and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol can significantly lower your risk.

**Reference:** Western Cape Government: Hypertension myths

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