

HEALTH REPORT

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SILENT IMPACT OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE MAY BE PUTTING LIVES AT RISK

Despite one-in-seven Australians having high blood pressure, new research released today reveals a lack of understanding has the potential to make the condition a silent killer.

The research, published today in the Pfizer Australia Health Report, found that 77 percent of Australians are unaware that there are no symptoms of high blood pressure.

Almost 45 percent of all Australians mistakenly think that symptoms do exist – when, in fact, they usually do not.

Kidney Health Australia CEO, Anne Wilson, says these findings reveal a lack of understanding in the community that may be putting lives at risk.

“Because high blood pressure usually produces no symptoms, most people don’t even realise they have it – and that can be dangerous – especially when it is a major risk factor for heart attacks, heart failure, strokes and even kidney disease,” she said.

“Everyone should have their blood pressure checked regularly, at least once a year if you are otherwise young and healthy, and more often if you are not. Regular checks are the only way of monitoring for the condition.”

The research says that smokers are particularly at risk, being up to three times as likely not to know their blood pressure status, compared to non smokers (11 percent versus three percent).

“High blood pressure is a major community health issue which is significantly influenced by a number of lifestyle factors including weight, exercise, diet and whether you smoke or not. The fact that smokers are less informed than the rest of the population is of particular concern,” added Ms Wilson.

Smokers are also less aware than non-smokers of the lifestyle changes that can assist in managing high blood pressure, such as body weight, smoking and alcohol consumption. They are less aware of the consequences of having uncontrolled blood pressure –like heart disease, kidney disease and death.



Some 60 percent of smokers were found to have little or no understanding of what blood pressure means compared to 43 percent of non-smokers.

Kidney Health Australia says the good news is that understanding of blood pressure seems to increase with age.

"We found that older people are more likely to understand that 140/90 is the entry level for high blood pressure. We also found that this sector of the community is more likely to have their blood pressure checked more often," said Ms Wilson.

While lack of understanding may be an issue for the rest of the population, Ms Wilson says there is some good news.

"On average, Australians are having their blood pressure checked by a GP every six months. Close to seven in 10 of those who had their blood pressure checked in the last twelve months report their GP discussing the subject with them. This is a great start," concluded Ms Wilson.

Kidney Health Australia's tips on avoiding high blood pressure

- Leading a healthy lifestyle is one of the best ways to both treat and prevent hypertension
- This means:
 - Exercising daily (at least 30 minutes a day five times a week)
 - Eating a healthy low fat and low salt diet
 - Maintaining a normal weight
 - Moderating alcohol intake
 - Reducing stress
 - Not smoking

To assist with educating the public about blood pressure and Kidney Health, Kidney Health Australia has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

The findings on blood pressure are based on responses from 1,405 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in 2006 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

Pfizer Australia is the nation's leading research-based health care company, investing over \$A42m in local research and development annually. It discovers, develops, manufactures and markets innovative medical treatments for both humans and animals. For more information, visit www.pfizer.com.au.

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NB: INTERVIEWS AVAILABLE WITH ANNE WILSON, CEO OF KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA

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