

CHRONIC DISEASES

What is a chronic disease?



A chronic disease is any condition that will affect you over the long term, and usually for the rest of your life.

Many chronic diseases can be controlled through changes to your diet, increasing exercise, stopping smoking and by taking the medicines prescribed by your doctor for these conditions.

Examples of chronic conditions include:

- Diabetes
- HIV
- Hypertension

You are at increased risk for these conditions:

- If you are overweight or
- If you are not physically active or
- You have a poor diet or
- You smoke or
- You drink alcohol excessively or
- You engage in unprotected sex

INTE-AFRICA

Researchers from Tanzania, Uganda, and Europe are studying a new way of providing health services for chronic conditions together in one place. The researchers want to know whether this is better than the current practice of providing chronic care, which is separately for each condition.

Various clinics throughout Tanzania and Uganda are participating in this study and are asking patients with diabetes, HIV, or hypertension to join the research study.

Participating clinics are happy to answer any questions you may have.

For country-specific resources on diabetes, hypertension, and HIV, please visit www.inteafrica.org/resources/



CHRONIC DISEASES CARE



What is diabetes?

Diabetes is also known as high blood sugar. It occurs when the body is unable to control the level of sugar in the blood. This can lead to serious sickness and early death. Many people have diabetes without knowing it because the symptoms may not appear or because they are not obviously linked to the disease. Symptoms of high blood sugar, when they occur, may include:

- Feeling thirsty
- Feeling tired or dizzy
- Frequent urination

Diabetes complications

If diabetes is not properly managed, it leads to serious complications. Diabetes damages the heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys, and nerves. This can lead to:

- Heart attacks
- Strokes
- Kidney failure
- Eye sight problems, including blindness
- Bad foot ulcers that can lead to amputation
- Impotence

If you do not have diabetes, you may be able to prevent it through diet and lifestyle changes:

- Be physically active
- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Eat healthy food.

If you have diabetes, you may be asked to take medication. You should exercise for at least 30 minutes daily, and lose weight if you are overweight.

You should also be careful about what you eat. It is good to eat more vegetables and more fruit and cut down on food with bad fats or high amounts of sugar (such as fried food, cakes, fizzy drinks).

With these measures, you should be able to control your diabetes and reduce your chances of developing complications. Thus, diet and lifestyle changes work to both prevent diabetes and maintain blood sugar control if you have already developed the disease.

What is hypertension?

Hypertension is also known as high blood pressure. When blood vessels become stiff or partially blocked, or affected by any other causes, more pressure is needed to move blood through the body. The heart and other organs then work harder because of this higher pressure. This can result in other serious sickness and early death.

High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer”. Most people with high blood pressure are not aware of their condition because they do not feel the rise in pressure. Many people only find out when they develop a complication.

Hypertension complications

If your hypertension is not diagnosed and well controlled, the situation can worsen and it can lead to serious complications including

- Heart attack or heart failure
- Stroke
- Kidney disease

Hypertension prevention and management

Hypertension can be prevented through weight loss if you are overweight, regular exercise (at least 30 minutes per day), and reducing the amount of salt you have in your diet. Stopping smoking and reducing drinking alcohol also helps to prevent high blood pressure.

If you already have high blood pressure, then it is important to help control your blood pressure by losing weight if you are overweight, exercising regularly, and reducing your salt intake. If you are prescribed medicine for hypertension, then taking it daily and on time is important.

What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks the cells that help your body fight infection. It is contracted when body fluids pass from a person with HIV to an uninfected person, most commonly during unprotected sex or through sharing injecting drug equipment with an infected person.

If you acquire HIV infection, you may not feel sick or have any symptoms for several years as initially the body is able to keep the virus under control. It is important to test for HIV as soon as you suspect that you have been exposed to the virus through unsafe practices, as early as possible, by visiting a health facility.

If you have been diagnosed with HIV, you should begin HIV treatment as quickly as possible. The main treatment for HIV is antiretroviral therapy (ART) and, if taken correctly every day, it will likely stop HIV from multiplying in your body. In this way, ART should prevent you from getting sick and will greatly reduce the chance of you transmitting HIV to others.

However, if left untreated, HIV infection will lead to opportunistic infections and finally to the disease known as AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) and to death soon after AIDS is diagnosed. Also, you can easily transmit HIV to others during sexual intercourse, sharing needles, and other ways if you do not take treatment.

There is no cure for HIV.

If you are HIV positive, it is important to continue monitoring for other diseases such as hypertension and diabetes.

