

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PULMONARY HYPERTENSION

## What Is Pulmonary Hypertension?

Pulmonary hypertension (PH) is when you have high blood pressure in the arteries that carry blood to your lungs. This makes your heart work harder than usual, which can weaken it over time. PH is a progressive disease that requires ongoing management and does not currently have a cure.

## What Causes It?

PH is usually caused by another medical condition. Heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, pulmonary fibrosis, pulmonary embolism, lupus, and obstructive sleep apnea may lead to PH. More rarely, pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH) can be genetic or can happen with no known cause.

## What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

- Shortness of breath during routine activities (most common)
- Tiredness
- Chest pain
- Fainting or feeling lightheaded
- Leg or ankle swelling
- Racing heartbeat

The average patient has symptoms for 2 years before a diagnosis of PH is made. Younger patients with unexplained, progressive shortness of breath should be evaluated for PH.

## How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask about your symptoms, other medical conditions, and family history. He or she will conduct a physical examination to look for signs of PH and run tests to determine the cause and severity of disease.
- Tests, like an echocardiogram, will estimate the pressure in your pulmonary arteries and evaluate your heart function. Pulmonary function testing measures how your lungs are working. Other tests could include chest x-rays, lung scans, blood tests, and a sleep study if sleep apnea is suspected.
- If tests show you might have PH, you may need cardiac catheterization to confirm the diagnosis and help guide treatment. This procedure directly measures the pressure in your heart and pulmonary arteries and shows how your heart is pumping blood to the rest of your body.



- If you are diagnosed with PH, you may be asked to do a walking test so your doctor can see how severe your disease is by monitoring your oxygen level and heart during exercise.

## How Is It Treated?

- Treatment depends on the cause and is generally focused on aggressively treating the underlying medical condition.
- If you have PH, you will benefit from mild to moderate exercise and should be evaluated to see if you need supplemental oxygen. You should consult your physician about the best type of exercise program for you.
- Treatment may include diuretics, anticoagulants, vasodilators, and more advanced therapies. If you have advanced PH that does not respond to treatment, a lung transplant may be recommended.
- The goal is to reduce symptoms and address diseases or conditions that worsen PH.
- PH has no cure, but early treatment may slow disease progression and control symptoms.

## Questions for My Doctor

- What is the cause of my PH?
- What changes can I make in my life to help improve my symptoms?
- Do I need to take medicine?
- Do I need oxygen therapy?
- What are the risks or side effects of treatment?
- Can I keep doing the things I like to do?
- What types of exercise are best for me?
- How often should I have follow-up visits?
- Will I need to see any other doctors?

## For More Information



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### MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/pulmonaryhypertension.html>

### Pulmonary Hypertension Association

<https://phassociation.org/patients/aboutph>