



## Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (PAH)

Pulmonary arterial hypertension is a rare condition that increases the pressure in the arteries of the lungs, which carries blood from the heart to the lungs.

### What are the most common causes of pulmonary arterial hypertension?

- Tumors pressing against the pulmonary artery.
- Problems with your heart, lungs, or blood vessels.
- An infection, such as schistosomiasis (parasitic disease) or HIV.
- Portal hypertension or cirrhosis.
- Connective tissue diseases, such as scleroderma, lupus, or rheumatoid arthritis.
- Certain weight loss medications or illegal drugs.

### What are the signs and symptoms of pulmonary arterial hypertension?

- Feeling tired and weak
- Weight gain or poor appetite
- Joint pain
- Difficulty breathing when you exercise
- Abdominal swelling
- Chest pain or heart palpitations (pounding, racing heartbeats)
- Dizziness or feeling like you are going to pass out.

### How is PAH diagnosed?

You may need to have any of the following tests:

- **Blood tests** can be used to find the cause of your PAH. A blood vessel test may be used to see if the small arteries in your lungs widen (dilate) when medicine is given to you. The pressure in your pulmonary artery will be measured before and after the medicine is given.

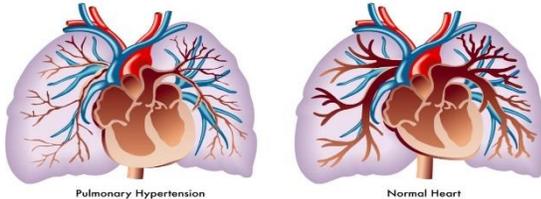
- An **EKG** can be used to see damage or problems in your heart. A short period of electrical activity of the heart is recorded.
- An **X-ray, echocardiogram, CT scan, or MRI** may be used to show the structure, movement, and blood vessels of your heart. You will likely be given contrast liquid so that caregivers can see the images better.
- **Cardiac catheterization** is a procedure used to find or treat a heart condition. A catheter is placed in your arm, neck, or groin and threaded up to your heart. Contrast liquid is injected into an artery and x-rays of its blood flow are taken.
- **Pulmonary function tests (LFTs)** help doctors see how well your body can use oxygen by measuring the amount of air that you breathe in and out for a set amount of time.
- A **lung ventilation and perfusion test** take pictures of your lungs. Contrast dye is given through an IV. The contrast dye helps the blood in the lungs show up more clearly on the screen. During ventilation, you will breathe in a medical gas. Pictures are taken to see how well your lungs are taking in oxygen.



## How is PAH treated?

PAH is not cured. The goal of treatment is to improve your health and keep it from getting worse. You may need:

- Medicines to improve your blood flow, remove extra fluid, or prevent blood clots. These can make it easier for you to bleed or bruise. Use a soft toothbrush and an electric razor to prevent bleeding gums and skin.
- You may be given extra oxygen if your blood level lower than normal.
- Surgery can help blood flow from one part of the heart to another when treatments don't work, and your condition is serious.



## What can I do to control PAH?

- **Check your blood pressure at home.** Sit down and rest for 5 minutes before taking your blood pressure. Extend your arm and support it on a flat surface, at the same height as your heart. Check your blood pressure at least twice a day at the same time each day, one in the morning and one at night. Keep a record of the readings for your reference. Ask your doctor what your blood pressure should be.
- **Limit sodium (salt)** as too much can affect fluid balance in the body. Check labels for foods low in sodium or without added salt. Too much potassium can also cause health problems.
- **Follow the meal plan** recommended by your doctor. A dietitian or nutritionist can give you more information on low sodium plans.

- **Limit fluids.** Check with your doctor how much liquid you should drink per day. It may be limited to less than 2 liters a day.
- **Do not smoke.** Nicotine and other chemicals in cigarettes and cigars can increase your blood pressure and can also cause lung damage.
- **Restrict alcohol consumption.** Women should limit alcohol consumption to 1 drink per day. Men should limit alcohol consumption to 2 drinks a day. One drink equals 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 ½ ounces of liquor.
- **Exercise as directed.** Exercise can help decrease your symptoms and improve your heart function. Exercise helps control weight. Don't start an exercise program without checking with your doctor.

### Social and Emotional Aspect

For tips, tools, and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after your medical treatment, please visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

#### Medical Advice Line

1-844-347-7801

TTY-1-844-347-7804

#### References:

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 Medline Plus. Retrieved from <https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000112.htm>

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