

Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is often called the ‘silent killer’. This is because one in five adults have high blood pressure (hypertension), yet most don’t know it. Unfortunately, there are usually no warning signs to alert you that your blood pressure is too high, so the only way to find out is to have it measured by a doctor, nurse or health professional.

By lowering your blood pressure you can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease (heart attack and stroke).

What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the measure of how hard your heart has to work to pump blood around the body. A blood pressure reading gives two numbers, for example 130/80. The top number (130) is the **systolic pressure**, the peak pressure in your arteries when the heart contracts (beats). The bottom number (80) is the **diastolic pressure**, the pressure in your arteries when the heart rests between beats. **Both numbers are important.**

An ideal blood pressure is less than 130/80.

Your doctor, nurse or health professional should discuss your target blood pressure level with you, taking into account your overall risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

Many things affect your blood pressure. It is normal for your blood pressure to increase during physical activity or when you are excited, angry or afraid. These are usually short-lived episodes. However, long periods of high blood pressure at rest are a cause for concern.

What causes high blood pressure?

In most people we don’t know what causes high blood pressure, but high blood pressure often runs in families. Occasionally kidney or glandular diseases may be responsible.

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Being overweight, excessive alcohol intake, a high salt intake and lack of physical activity can also contribute to high blood pressure.

Why is it important to control high blood pressure?

Normal blood pressure delivers an effective blood supply to all parts of the body without damaging sensitive organs. High blood pressure means your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body. This can cause permanent damage to delicate organs, such as the eyes, kidneys and brain, as well as increasing your risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

How can I lower my blood pressure?

Simple lifestyle modifications are important for the prevention and treatment of high blood pressure, including:

- ♥ Having your blood pressure checked by your doctor, nurse or health professional
- ♥ Following a heart healthy dietary pattern* that includes eight servings of coloured vegetables & fruit and two-four servings of low-fat milk products a day
- ♥ Lowering your salt intake – choose low sodium foods and add less salt when cooking
- ♥ Losing weight if you are overweight
- ♥ Maintaining an ideal body weight
- ♥ Moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes on most days or daily
- ♥ If you smoke, seeking help to stop
- ♥ Restricting your alcohol intake.

If your doctor has prescribed medications to help lower your blood pressure, take as directed. **Many people who take blood pressure lowering medication will need it for life.**

Check ups

If you are taking blood pressure medication, it is important to have your blood pressure monitored every three months until it is controlled and then every six months. If you think you have any side-effects from your medication, report them to your doctor immediately.

*Ask your GP, nurse or health professional for an information sheet.