

## Blood pressure- what you need to know

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### What is blood pressure?

Blood is transferred across the body, from heart to brain and other parts of the body through our arteries. In order for this to happen you need a certain amount of pressure to get the blood moving around your body. Blood pressure is the pressure of blood in your arteries. It is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg) and is recorded using two numbers:

- **Systolic pressure** (the higher number): is the pressure when your heart pushes blood out.
- **Diastolic pressure** (the lower number): is the pressure when your heart relaxes between beats.

As a general guide:

- High blood pressure is a reading of 140/90mmHg or higher (or if you are over the age of 80 150/90mmHg or higher)
- Ideal blood pressure is a reading between 90/60mmHg and 120/80mmHg
- Low blood pressure is a reading of 90/60mmHg or lower

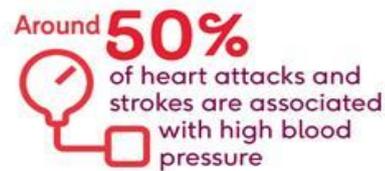
An estimated 7 million people in the UK are not aware that they have high blood pressure and some only find out after suffering a stroke or a heart attack.

### Check your blood pressure

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have a blood pressure test. You can get this done at your GP surgery, some pharmacies or with a home blood pressure monitor.

### Hypertension

Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure. It means your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body. If ignored, it can lead to a heart attack, stroke, kidney disease and problems with your eyesight.



Source: British Heart Foundation

### Causes of hypertension

The cause of hypertension is not always clear but there are specific factors that may contribute towards it.

You are at a higher risk developing high blood pressure if you:

- Are overweight
- Are over the age of 65
- Are of black African or black Caribbean descent
- Eat too much salty food
- Have a member of your family with hypertension
- Have low levels of physical activity
- Smoke
- Drink too much alcohol
- Drink too much caffeine
- Do not get adequate sleep



## Dietary changes that might help you lower your blood pressure

**Reducing salt:** As a nation, we are currently consuming 8g of salt per day, which is a third more than the recommended maximum of 6g a day for adults. Around 75% of the salt we eat is already in the foods we buy such as breads, breakfast cereals and ready meals. Your taste buds will eventually get used to lower salt.

Below are some tips of how to reduce the salt in your diet:

- When cooking, try to use herbs and spices for extra flavour instead of salt. Taste your food prior to adding it.
- Compare nutrition labels when buying everyday foods such as breakfast cereal, sauces and ready-meals and choose lower salt products. Our Factsheet on *Food Labels* has more information on this.

	Low	Medium	High
Salt	0-0.3g	0.3-1.5g	More than 1.5g
Sodium	0-0.1g	0.1-0.6g	More than 0.6g

Source: *British Dietetic Association Factsheet*

- Avoid keeping salt on your dining table. If it's there you are more prone to use it. Flavour with black pepper instead!
- Try to avoid salty snacks such as crisps, and nuts.

- If you are using a stock cube don't add any salt, as stock cubes already contain a high amount of salt. Look out for reduced-salt stock.

**Limit your alcohol intake:** Drinking alcohol can increase your blood pressure. UK guidelines suggest both men and women should consume no more than 14 units of alcohol per week, which is spread evenly across the week and preferably having some alcohol-free days each week.

**Cut down on caffeine:** Drinking more than 4 cups of coffee a day may increase your blood pressure. If you drink a lot of caffeine-rich drinks, such as cola, energy drinks and coffee try to cut down.

**Body weight:** Maintaining a healthy weight can lower your blood pressure. Being overweight makes your heart work harder to pump blood around your body, which can raise your blood pressure. If you are overweight, losing even a few pounds will make a big difference to your blood pressure and general health.

**Physical activity:** Regular physical activity can lower your blood pressure as well as help control your weight. Aim for at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) of moderate intensity activity, such as brisk walking or cycling each week. If you suffer from a heart condition please check with your doctor first before undertaking any exercise.

### References

1. **British Heart Foundation, High Blood Pressure.** Available: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/risk-factors/high-blood-pressure>
2. **NHS, High Blood Pressure (hypertension).** Available: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/high-blood-pressure-hypertension/>
3. **British Dietetic Association, Hypertension and Diet: Food Fact Sheet,** Available: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/hypertension-diet.html>
4. **Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition and Health, Salt and Health.** Available: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/338782/SACN\\_Salt\\_and\\_Health\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/338782/SACN_Salt_and_Health_report.pdf)