

Hypertension

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is one of the most common medical conditions in the UK, needing long-term treatment. With increasing age, blood pressure levels rise. There are generally no signs or symptoms of high blood pressure, so it is important that you have your blood pressure checked regularly to make sure levels are within a healthy range. It is not a disease, but can be a major cause of heart disease and strokes. If you have high blood pressure and you also smoke, have high blood cholesterol or are generally unfit, the risk of you having a stroke or heart attack increases.

WHAT CAUSES HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

In about 10% of cases, the cause of high blood pressure can be related to another medical condition – this can be confirmed by your doctor. However, for most people, there is no specific cause for their high blood pressure, and it is likely to be affected by a combination of things including:

- A family history of high blood pressure
- Lack of physical activity
- Obesity
- High alcohol intake
- High intake of salt
- Smoking

Making changes to your lifestyle to address some of these factors can lower your blood pressure and reduce the need for medications. See our tips for [Staying Healthy](#).

To lose weight you need to eat healthily. Some simple tips for improving your eating habits are listed below:

- Use low-fat dairy foods, such as skimmed milk, low-fat cheese and low-fat yoghurt
- Choose grilled or baked lean meat and skinless chicken and fish instead of fried, fatty foods
- Choose fresh fruit instead of biscuits, cakes and chocolate
- Drink low-alcohol beer or dilute your drink with soda water or low-calorie lemonade. Alternate water and alcoholic drinks and try limiting alcohol to two units a day
- Lowering the amount of salt you eat can help reduce your blood pressure and help your medication work better

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

Regular exercise lowers blood pressure by about 5 to 10 points in people who have not been active before. Your blood pressure can be most effectively lowered by exercises such as walking,

swimming, cycling and running. Simply try to do regular, moderate exercise, preferably every day. However, if you have not been exercising regularly in the past see our safety tips below:

- Try not to exercise too hard
- Don't exercise immediately after eating or drinking alcohol
- Avoid exercise when it is very hot, humid or cold
- Stop exercising if you feel unusual chest pain, dizziness or discomfort. Tell your doctor if you have any of these symptoms when exercising
- Too much physical and emotional stress can also raise blood pressure, so find out what is causing your stress and try to relax both mentally and physically.

WILL I NEED MEDICATION?

Many people need medication to keep their blood pressure under control. If you are on medication, take it as prescribed and be sure to discuss any problems with your doctor. You should see your doctor or nurse for review on a six monthly basis.

LIFESTYLE TIPS TO CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

- Stop smoking
- Keep to a healthy weight
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink
- Reduce your intake of salt
- Take regular exercise
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly