

## High Blood Pressure

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This leaflet explains what impacts having high blood pressure may have on your health, and what you can do to address it.

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### What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force your heart uses to pump blood around your body.

It is measured using two numbers:

- The top number (systolic) is when your heart pumps
- The bottom number (diastolic) is when your heart rests



A typical reading for adults is around 120/70, but this can vary from person to person.

### What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure means your reading is higher than it should be for you. A reading of 140/90 or higher is usually seen as high.

### Who is at risk?

High blood pressure is common and affects many adults in the UK.

It is more common in:

- Men
- Older people
- People with a family history of high blood pressure

### What causes it?

Blood pressure can go up when your blood vessels become narrower, so your heart has to work harder to push blood around your body.

For most people, there is no clear cause. This is called essential hypertension, and it can run in families. Lifestyle also plays a part. Eating too much salt, not being active, being overweight, smoking, and drinking too much alcohol can all raise blood pressure.

In a small number of people, high blood pressure is caused by another health problem. It can also increase for a short time during pregnancy.

## Why does it matter?

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms, but over time it can increase your risk of:

- Heart attack
- Stroke



Very high blood pressure can sometimes cause symptoms like headaches, dizziness, or shortness of breath.

## Treatment

Making healthy lifestyle changes can help lower your blood pressure.

Some people may also need medicine. Your doctor may prescribe medicines such as:

- Tablets that help your body remove salt and water
- Medicines that relax your blood vessels
- Medicines that reduce how hard your heart pumps

You may need to try more than one type before finding what works best for you.

## What can you do?

You can help lower your blood pressure by:

- Keeping to a healthy weight
- Eating less salt
- Eating more fruit and vegetables
- Being active (for example, a brisk 20-minute walk each day)
- Managing stress
- Stopping smoking (your GP can help)
- Drinking less alcohol (no more than 14 units a week, with some alcohol-free days)



## Finally

We hope you have found this information helpful. Please ask your GP about anything you don't understand.

