

High Blood Pressure

Blood Pressure

The heart pumps blood, carrying nutrients and oxygen, around the body; the rate of blood flow being regulated by the smaller blood vessels. This rate of blood flow is known as “blood pressure” and is commonly referred to by two measurement values, e.g. 130/80. The higher (“systolic”) value is measured as the heart contracts; the lower (“diastolic”) as the heart relaxes. There is no “right” measurement for blood pressure as it will vary between individuals. However, as a general guide, a normal reading for a young person would be around 130/80. Levels above 140/90 would be regarded as high blood pressure (“hypertension”).

Blood pressure measurements are an important factor in determining the risk of a heart attack or stroke. High blood pressure can cause:

- blood vessel damage – making them more likely to leak or break
- blood clot formation – possibly leading to heart attacks or strokes
- kidney failure

Most people with high blood pressure will feel perfectly normal, therefore it is important that you have your blood pressure checked at least every few years, and more regularly as you get older. High blood pressure is the single most important risk factor for heart attacks and strokes! While high blood pressure cannot normally be “cured”, it can be successfully treated.

Medication

In the event of being diagnosed with high blood pressure, it is important that you get your blood pressure checked regularly until it is back at a safe level. This will probably be every few weeks initially, but probably once or twice a year once under control.

Most people with high blood pressure will need to rely on medication prescribed by their doctor. It is very important to use any such medication exactly as instructed. However, if you experience any side effects from your medication, you should **immediately** consult your doctor. In such a circumstance, different medication may be prescribed.

Advice

If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, modification of your current lifestyle may reduce the need for medication. For example, a change of diet, losing weight, getting more exercise, stopping smoking and reducing alcohol intake.

Salt intake can also have a significant effect on your blood pressure. It is recommended that healthy adults should consume no more than 6g of salt each day which is the equivalent of about one teaspoon. However please note that this includes salt which is “hidden” in processed foods, not just the amount added during cooking or while eating.