

Lifestyle advice for high blood pressure



Information for patients
Community Dietetics Service

What is blood pressure?

When your heart beats, it pumps blood round your body. As the blood moves, it pushes against the sides of the blood vessels. The strength of this pushing is your blood pressure. If your blood pressure is too high, it puts extra strain on your blood vessels, and your heart. This may lead to heart attacks and strokes.

How can lifestyle changes help?

Lifestyle changes have been shown to help reduce blood pressure. They can be used, along with tablets (if prescribed), to help reduce your risk of heart disease and strokes.

What lifestyle changes can help?

- **Weight**
Aim to keep your weight at a healthy level, or reduce your weight if you are overweight.
- **Exercise**
Aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes, 5 times each week. This should be activity that causes you to feel warm and slightly out of breath. Build up slowly if you are new to exercise, and check with your doctor before you start.
- **Salt**
Reduce your intake to less than 6g (about 1 level teaspoon) of salt per day. A quarter of the salt we eat comes from adding salt to cooking, or at the table. Three quarters of the salt we eat comes from processed foods such as bacon, cooked meats, crisps, soups and stock cubes. Food labels can guide you in the right direction. For example:
 - 0.3g or less of sodium per 100g is a low salt option
 - 0.31g to 1.5g of sodium per 100g is a medium salt option
 - More than 1.5g sodium per 100g is a high salt option

Remember, with a bit of patience you can lose your taste for salty foods. It will take 2 to 3 weeks for your taste buds to adjust.

How to eat less salt: 4 handy hints

1. Eat less processed foods and more fresh foods
2. Cut down, or cut out, salt and stock cubes in cooking
3. Avoid adding salt to foods at the table
4. Look for no added salt or low salt on food labels

Alternative flavourings to try instead of salt

- Pepper, mustard, onions, garlic, vinegar, lemon juice
- Herbs (e.g. mint, parsley, basil, bay leaves)
- Spices (e.g. chilli, nutmeg, paprika and ginger)
- Add grated nutmeg to cabbage, cauliflower or Brussels sprouts
- Onion, garlic and herbs can be used in casseroles, soups and sauces
- Dry or fresh mint can be added to potatoes or peas
- Squeeze lemon juice onto freshly cooked vegetables
- Marinade or brush meat / fish / poultry with a small amount of oil mixed with lemon juice, pepper, and your choice of herbs

More ideas to help you reduce your blood pressure

- **Alcohol**
Aim to keep alcohol intake below 14 units per week for men and women. One unit is equivalent to about half a pint of ordinary strength beer or lager, one 25ml glass (single measure) of spirits or one 125ml (small) glass of wine. Try to have at least 2 alcohol free days each week.
- **Caffeine**
Drinking more than 4 cups of coffee, or other high caffeine drinks such as cola, each day can increase blood pressure. Try caffeine free or decaffeinated varieties.
- **Relaxation**
Stress management, meditation, muscle relaxation, or other relaxation therapies such as mindfulness, can help to reduce blood pressure.
- **Smoking**
There is not a strong link between smoking and high blood pressure. However, there is a strong link between smoking and increased risk of heart disease. Stopping smoking does therefore reduce your risk of heart disease.
- **Healthy eating**
Follow a healthy and balanced diet. Eat at least 5 portions of vegetables and fruit each day. Eat less saturated fat, and less salt.



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