

INFORMATION ON HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND NUTRITION

This is an information sheet about high blood pressure. It gives you some basic information about the condition and some practical tips to help you manage it with improvements to your dietary habits.

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is recorded with two numbers. The first one (higher) is the systolic blood pressure which shows the pressure the heart -as a pump- has to overcome when it beats in order to push the blood all around the body; the second number (lower) is the diastolic blood pressure which shows the pressure in the arteries when the heart is resting in between beats.

Generally, high blood pressure is considered to be above 140/90 (or 150/90 when you are >80y.o.).



Image by DFAT photo library

What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

High blood pressure (or hypertension) does not usually cause symptoms unless significantly raised.

High blood pressure affects 1 in 4 adults in the UK

What causes high blood pressure and who develops it?

Risk factors related to developing high blood pressure include:

- ❖ Diet high in salt, sugar and fat
- ❖ Smoking
- ❖ Drinking too much alcohol/ caffeine
- ❖ Lack of physical exercise
- ❖ Being overweight or obese
- ❖ Sleep apnoea
- ❖ Having diabetes, high cholesterol or kidney disease
- ❖ Family history of high blood pressure
- ❖ Older age
- ❖ Black African/ Caribbean origin
- ❖ Chronic stress

High blood pressure is the biggest risk factor for cardiovascular disease (heart attacks, strokes, heart failure)

What are the risks when someone has high blood pressure?

High blood pressure can damage different organs in the body – the heart, the kidneys, the brain, the eyes. It increases the risk of heart failure, coronary artery disease, stroke, chronic kidney disease, peripheral arterial disease, aneurysms and vascular dementia.

What can I do to lower my high blood pressure?

There are many things that you can do in your day-to-day life that can have a significant impact in improving your blood pressure and reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

- ✓ Follow a healthy diet**
 - ✓ Stop smoking
 - ✓ Reduce/ stop alcohol
- ✓ Reduce caffeine consumption
 - ✓ Manage your weight
- ✓ Do regular physical activity
 - ✓ Manage your stress

** in this leaflet we are focusing on the things that you can do specifically with your diet to better manage your blood pressure

Research has shown that there is an overall eating plan that can help both prevent developing high blood pressure but also help lower an already raised one. This plan follows the principles of **DASH** – **D**ietary **A**pproaches to **S**top **H**ypertension.

This approach emphasises the consumption of vegetables, fruits, low-fat dairy products, foods high in fibre and foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol. DASH traditionally contains wholegrains, nuts, fish and poultry but reduced amounts of fats, red meat, processed foods and foods high in sugar content.

Increase the consumption of fruits, vegetables and other fibre

- ✓ Include at least **4-5 servings of whole fresh fruit and 4-5 servings of vegetable** in your day. A serving equals to either one cup of raw vegetables/ fruits or half cup of cooked ones
- ✓ Include **nuts, seeds and pulses** (beans, peas) at least four times weekly
- ✓ Replace “white stuff” with **wholegrain** ones (e.g. bread, rice) as these offer more fibre
- ✓ Some fruits and vegetables have extra **potassium** which can help with the regulation of salt (sodium) in the body, e.g. potatoes, bananas, tomatoes, oranges. Seek advice from your doctor if you have kidney problems.

Be mindful of fats

- ✓ Reduce the consumption of butter, cooking creams, margarine or ready made salad dressings; **switch to olive oil** and other vegetable based oils and spreads
- ✓ If you consume dairy products, be careful with **low-fat** choices as they **may contain extra sugar**; eat cheese in moderation



Image by Ruth and Dave (up left), rick lingthelm (above)

Cut down on salt (sodium)

People who eat a lot of salt are at higher risk of developing high blood pressure. Most people eat much more salt than they should so we should all be considering to reduce the amount of salt in our diet.

It is estimated that 75% of the salt we consume comes from processed and restaurant food

Simple tips to reduce the salt in your diet:

- ✓ Choose **fresh food**
- ✓ **Reduce** the consumption of **processed foods** (e.g. canned soups, ready meals and snacks, etc) as they are usually high in salt
- ✓ Reduce the consumption of bacon, sausage, pastrami, ham, salami and avoid smoked, pickled or cured foods
- ✓ **Replace salt with spices and herbs** when you are cooking
- ✓ If you are using stock cubes, **don't add extra salt** as they already contain salt
- ✓ Check the **labels** when shopping (green-amber-red traffic light system tells you whether low or high in salt)



Image by ali eminov

Reduce caffeine and alcohol

- ✓ Make water (or flavoured water) your preferred drink
- ✓ Switch to **non-caffeinated products** (e.g. decaf coffee, tea)
- ✓ If you still have caffeinated drinks, do not exceed four cups a day
- ✓ **Reduce alcohol** consumption and avoid binge drinking



Image by Greg Riegler

Be smart on snacking

Ready made snacks are usually highly processed and high in salt and sugar.

- ✓ If you know you are going to need a snack, prepare **chopped vegetables** or have a handful of **unsalted nuts**
- ✓ Another idea can be **natural/ Greek yoghurt with fruits/ seeds** (best for you to prepare it, rather than buying ready made ‘fruit yoghurts’ that can be high in sugar)

Other lifestyle factors to consider

➤ **Quit smoking**

Smoking is a big factor in high blood pressure, so it would be best to consider quitting altogether.

➤ **Maintain healthy weight**

As mentioned above, being overweight (especially when the weight is around the tummy area) can play significant part in high blood pressure and in your risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

➤ **Doing physical exercise**

Being physically active can help lower your blood pressure and help you in case of needing to lose weight. If you don't exercise at all, consider starting with small steps (e.g. brief bouts of brisk walk). We have another more specific sheet on high blood pressure and exercise that is available to you.

➤ **Managing stress**

Chronic stress can lead to increased blood pressure. By getting enough sleep, learning relaxation techniques (mindfulness, meditation, etc) or asking for help to manage your stress can help.