

## Checklist



Session time:  
**30 minutes**

## You will need

- Training card 7
- Visual card 7



- Summary sheet 7



- Food cards – pack one & two



## Session 7

# Controlling blood pressure

The aim of the session is to understand:

- ✓ What blood pressure is and how it's measured.
- ✓ What high blood pressure is and what causes it.
- ✓ The effect of high blood pressure on the heart.
- ✓ Practical tips for controlling high blood pressure.

The information you need to get across is:

 10 minutes

### What is blood pressure and how is it measured?

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood in the arteries. You need this pressure to keep your blood flowing.

Your heart pumps blood around your body through the arteries by contracting and relaxing. When your heart contracts, the blood is forced through the arteries. This is when your blood pressure is at its highest point and is called the **systolic pressure**. When your heart relaxes between beats, your blood pressure reaches its lowest point, known as **diastolic pressure**.

The two pressures are written as two numbers, eg, 120/80mmHg. (mmHg stands for millimetres of mercury.) The first number is the **systolic** pressure and the second number is the **diastolic** pressure.

The target for most people is to have a blood pressure of **below 140/85mmHg**. But, for people who have had a heart attack or stroke, or who have cardiovascular disease, diabetes or kidney disease, the target is to have a blood pressure **below 130/80mmHg**<sup>6</sup>.

### What is high blood pressure and what causes it?

High blood pressure – also known as hypertension – is when your blood pressure is constantly higher than it should be.

There is no single cause of high blood pressure. However, the following can all play a part:

- being overweight
- eating too much salt
- not doing enough physical activity
- drinking too much alcohol, and
- not eating enough fruit and vegetables.

Genes are another factor. So, if one or both of your parents have (or had) high blood pressure, you have a greater chance of developing it too.

## What effect does high blood pressure have on the heart?

High blood pressure:

- increases the risk of having a heart attack or a stroke
- over time can cause the heart muscle to become abnormally thick, or the pumping action of the heart to become less effective.

This could also lead to:

- heart failure
- kidney failure
- damage to your sight if left untreated for a long time.

High blood pressure rarely makes people feel ill, so **the only way of finding out if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure measured**. Your doctor or nurse can measure it for you. If you have a heart health risk assessment, your blood pressure will be taken as part of the assessment.

People of African Caribbean origin are at a higher risk of high blood pressure than the rest of the UK population. Also, South Asians need to make sure that their blood pressure is monitored and well controlled because of their increased risk of coronary heart disease and diabetes.

If you have high blood pressure, it is essential to control it. Even a small reduction in blood pressure can lower your risk of future problems. You may also need to take medicines, as directed by your doctor, to help reduce your blood pressure and protect your heart.

## Are there any practical tips on how to control your blood pressure?

### Keep to a healthy weight

Keeping to a healthy body weight will help control your blood pressure.

### Cut down on salt

Adults should eat no more than 6g of salt (about a teaspoonful) a day in total<sup>7</sup>. But it is important to remember that 75% of the salt we eat is already in the food we buy. So:

- cut down on processed foods
- don't add salt to your food at the table
- cook without adding any salt. (Try using extra pepper, herbs, garlic, spices or lemon juice to add flavour instead.)

### Be physically active

Being physically active can help you to control your blood pressure. Build up to doing 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity on at least five days a week. 'Moderate-intensity' means that the activity should make you feel warm and breathe slightly more heavily than usual, but you should still be able to talk. However, if you have uncontrolled or very high blood pressure, talk to your doctor before increasing the amount of activity you do, or before starting any new activities. For more information on physical activity, see Session 8 on page 40.

### Drink alcohol only in moderation

- Women should have no more than two to three units of alcohol a day.
- Men should have no more than three to four units a day<sup>8</sup>.

See chart on next page.

		1 unit of alcohol =
 <p><b>Men</b> No more than <b>3 to 4 units</b> of alcohol a day</p>	 <p><b>a small glass (100ml) of wine*</b> (10% alcohol by volume ABV) or</p>	
 <p><b>Women</b> No more than <b>2 to 3 units</b> of alcohol a day</p>	 <p><b>half a pint (300ml) of normal strength lager, cider or beer</b> (3% to 5% ABV) or</p>	
	 <p><b>a pub measure (25ml) of spirits</b></p>	

\*Note: Wine varies in alcohol content and a standard glass of wine in a pub will be 175ml, and a large glass 250ml.

### Eat more fruit and vegetables

Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day can help to keep your blood pressure down. Choose a variety to benefit from the range of nutrients that they all contain. (For more information on fruit and vegetables and on healthy eating, see page 57.)

## Pre-session preparation

Print out *Summary sheet 7* 

## Activities

### Key activity: Salt in food activity and discussion (whole group)

 20 minutes

Take 10 *Food cards* from the packs and place them randomly in a line, picture side up. (Make sure you choose cards that display a selection of green, amber and red traffic lights for salt.) Ask the group to think about how much salt the foods contain and to place them in order from low to high. When the group has agreed on the order, turn the cards over and look at their traffic light colour and amount of salt. If the order is incorrect discuss any foods which had a surprisingly high or low salt content. **(10 minutes)**

Discuss salt in food with the group. Ask them to answer the following questions: **(10 minutes)**

#### 1. Where is salt hidden?

- Processed foods such as canned soups, takeaways, and ready-prepared meals are prime culprits for containing high levels of salt. A staggering 75% of a person's dietary salt intake comes from processed foods alone. Also, be aware that some staple foods, such as bread and some breakfast cereals, have added salt, and that it can also be found in sweet foods such as cakes and biscuits.
- Check the ingredients on labels to find out which foods have the least salt.

#### 2. What is the recommended maximum daily amount of salt?

- Health experts recommend that adults should consume less than 6g of salt a day. To give you a clearer idea, one level teaspoon contains 6g of salt. Currently, the average daily intake of salt by adults in the UK is far too high – at over 8g a day.

#### 3. Are rock salt, flaked salt and salt substitute any better for you?

**Rock salt and flaked salt** – Salt is also known as sodium chloride. It's the sodium in salt that can raise your blood pressure. It doesn't matter how expensive the salt is, where it is from or whether it comes in grains, crystals or flakes – it still contains sodium.

**Salt substitute** – Reduced-sodium alternatives contain less sodium than standard salt and taste similar. But they are not sodium-free, so you will still be adding sodium to your food if you use these products. Salt substitutes are not suitable for individuals with high blood pressure or heart failure, so always check the label. Also, because these alternatives taste salty, they don't help you get used to less salty flavours. Gradually reduce the amount of salt you add when you're cooking and eating, until you use hardly any – or none at all. Your taste buds will soon get used to less salt and then you might appreciate some other flavours more.

#### 4. What are some alternatives to using salt?

- Adding salt to your food while you're cooking or at the table may seem like a hard habit to break. If you find this difficult, try adding some mixed herbs or spices to give your food more flavour. Your taste buds adapt surprisingly quickly to dietary changes. Cut down gradually and you shouldn't notice a difference.

## At the end of the session

Hand out *Summary sheet 7* 

### Background information

Although you now have all the basic information you need to deliver Session 7, here's some more detail you might find useful.

Your doctor or nurse will measure your blood pressure using a **blood pressure monitor**. This is usually a digital monitor, which is a box with a tube leading to a cuff. The cuff is wrapped round your upper arm. At the press of a button, the cuff inflates to a certain level and then automatically deflates. While it is inflated, the cuff will feel slightly uncomfortable as no blood can get through to your lower arm. A sensor in the cuff detects your pulse and shows your blood-pressure readings on a display screen.

#### Changes in blood pressure

Everyone's blood pressure varies during the day. It tends to be highest in the morning and lowest at night. Blood pressure may also become high if you are anxious or under stress. Some people get worried about seeing their doctor, and having their blood pressure taken can make it go up. Nearly everyone is nervous on the first visit and their blood pressure is usually higher than at later appointments.

### For more information

**bhf.org.uk**

**BHF Heart Helpline: 0300 330 3311** – for information and support on anything related to heart health.

This service is available in English only.

#### **BHF booklets:**

**Blood pressure** (in English)

**Blood pressure – and how to control it** (aimed at South Asians, in English and five South Asian languages)

**Cut down on salt** (in English and Welsh)

**Salt made simple** (aimed at South Asians, in English and five South Asian languages)

**Guide to food labelling** (in English)

#### **BHF DVDs:**

**Living to prevent heart disease** (aimed at South Asians, with soundtracks in English and five South Asian languages)

**Risking it** (English soundtrack and subtitles)

To order these free resources, call the **BHF Orderline** on **0870 600 6566**.

#### **Other organisations:**

**Blood Pressure Association: 0845 241 0989 [www.bpassoc.org.uk](http://www.bpassoc.org.uk)**