

Summary sheet 7

Controlling blood pressure



What is blood pressure?

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

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**.

How is it measured?

The two pressures are written as two numbers, eg, 120/80mmHg. 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**¹.






What is high blood pressure?

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

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 by your doctor or nurse**.

What causes high blood pressure and how can it be controlled?

What causes high blood pressure?	How it can be controlled
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• being overweight	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• try to keep to a healthy weight.• aim to lose 1 to 2 lbs per week.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• eating too much salt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cut down on salt.• cook with herbs instead of salt.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• not doing enough physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• be physically active.• try a 10-minute brisk walk at lunchtime or at the beginning of the day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• drinking too much alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• drink alcohol only in moderation.• try to stick to the recommended amounts of alcohol (see next page).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• not eating enough fruit and vegetables.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• eat more fruit and vegetables.• keep a record to see if you have your 5 a day.• try swapping unhealthy snacks for fruit.

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

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

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, and
- over time can cause the heart muscle to become abnormally thick, or the pumping action of the heart to become less effective.

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. Phone lines open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.

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 & Welsh)

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

1. British Cardiac Society, British Hypertension Society et al. 2005. JBS2: Joint British Societies' guidelines on prevention of cardiovascular disease in clinical practice. *Heart*; 91: 5: 1-52.