British Heart Foundation

10 MINUTES TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE
High blood pressure

FIGHT FOR EVERY HEARTBEAT

bhf.org.uk

High blood pressure isn't usually something that you can feel or notice, but if you have it you're more likely to have a heart attack or a stroke.

The good news is there are lots of things you can do to help lower your blood pressure so your risk is lower.

You're in control. By taking ten minutes every day to make small changes to your lifestyle, you could lower your blood pressure – and change your life.

ABOUT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

What is high blood pressure?

Your heart is a muscle that pumps blood around your body. **Blood pressure** is the way doctors describe how hard your blood is being pushed through your **arteries** – the tubes that carry blood from your heart to the rest of your body.

High blood pressure –sometimes called **hypertension** – means that your blood pressure is always higher than it should be.

In this booklet we give advice for people who have been told by a doctor or nurse that they have high blood pressure or are at risk of having high blood pressure. If you have low blood pressure, speak to your doctor.

Why am I at risk?

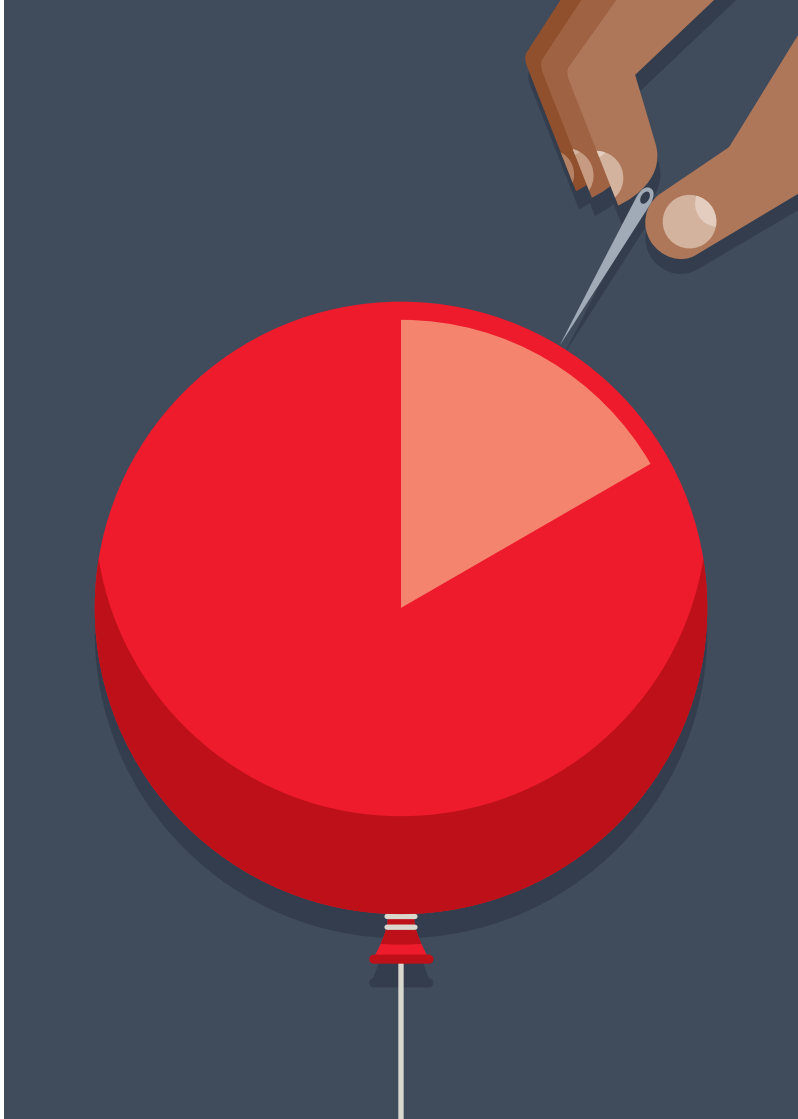
Your heart and brain need **oxygen** from your blood to work properly. If the tubes that supply your heart muscle or brain with blood (your **arteries**) get clogged up or blocked with fatty material, less oxygen can get to them.

If this happens to your heart muscle, you'll have a **heart attack**. If this happens and your brain doesn't get enough oxygen, you'll have a **stroke**.

So what does high blood pressure have to do with it?

High blood pressure puts extra pressure on the walls of your **arteries**. Over time this can damage them and means they are more likely to get clogged up – **so having high blood pressure means you're much more likely to have a heart attack or stroke**.

Over time high blood pressure can also cause your heart to get bigger (**enlarged**) which means it can't pump as well as it should. This can lead to **heart failure**.



What does my blood pressure reading mean?

When you have your blood pressure taken, you might see the result written as something like **140/90 mmHg** or hear it said as "**140 over 90**"

The first (or top) number of your reading is the pressure when your blood pressure is at its highest (when your heart squeezes). The second (or bottom) number is the pressure when your blood pressure is at its lowest (when your heart relaxes).

What should my blood pressure be?

Unless your doctor tells you something different, your blood pressure should be below 140/90 mmHg.

So if the first number in your blood pressure reading is over 140 or the second number is over 90, your doctor may tell you that you have high blood pressure.

If you have a problem with your heart or the tubes that carry your blood around your body (your **blood vessels**) like coronary heart disease, diabetes or kidney disease, then your blood pressure should be below 130/80mmHg.

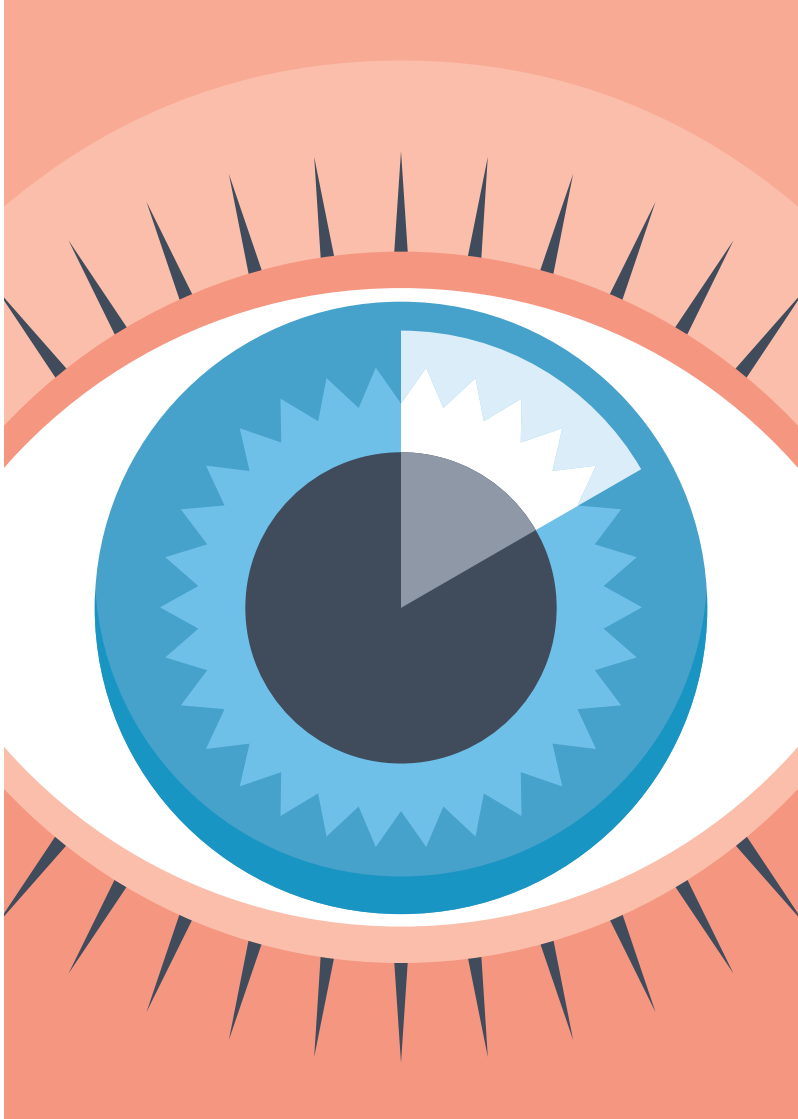
What does high blood pressure feel like?

Most people can't feel that they have high blood pressure and they only find out when they have their blood pressure checked.

But, in some rare cases, someone with very high blood pressure might have:

- blurred or double vision
- nosebleeds
- shortness of breath
- a headache that goes on for a long time

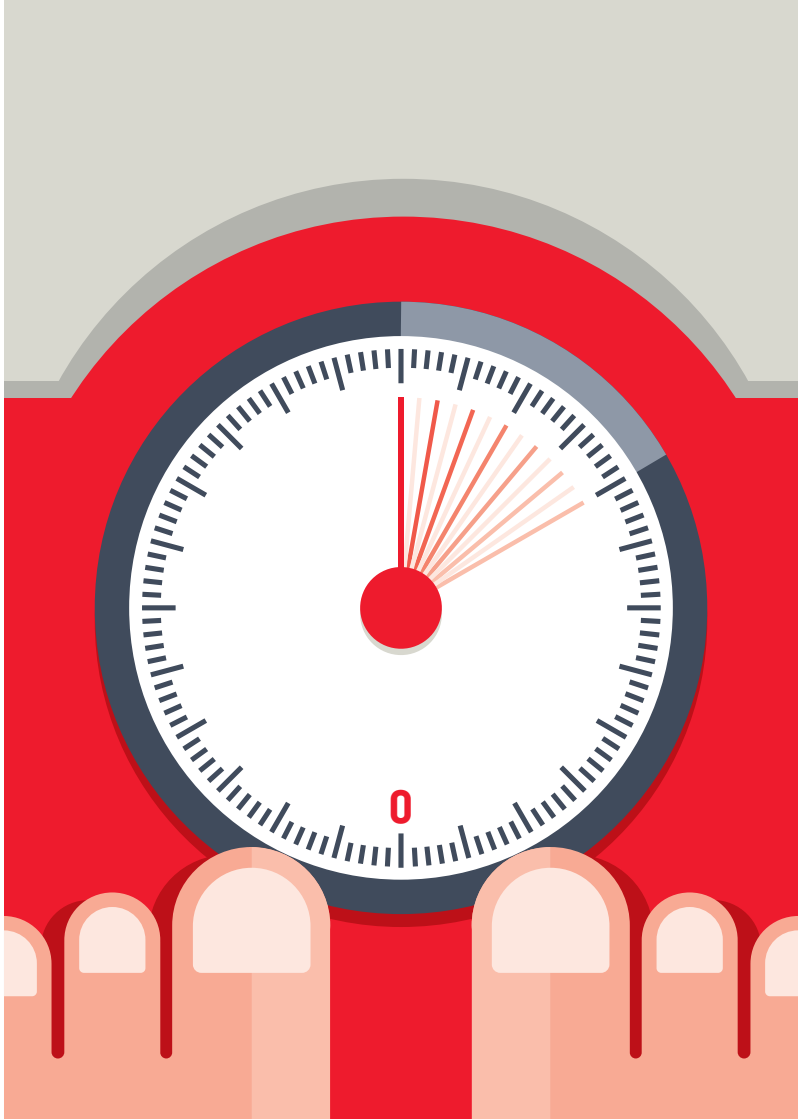
If you have any of these you should see your doctor as soon as possible.



Why do I have high blood pressure?

It can be hard to tell what has caused high blood pressure, but we know you're more likely to get it if:

- you're overweight
- you have too much salt in your diet
- you don't do enough physical activity
- you drink too much alcohol too often
- a close member of your family has high blood pressure.



TACKLING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Time for a change?

There are some simple things you can do to help lower your blood pressure.

- Eat a diet full of fruit and veg and low in saturated fat and salt.
- Drink less alcohol.
- Be active for at least 150 minutes a week. This activity should make you feel warmer, breathe harder and make your heart beat faster than usual.

To help keep your risk of a heart attack or stroke as low as possible, you should also quit smoking because smoking can cause your **arteries** to become clogged up much more quickly.

Take a look at the back page for your 10 minute blood pressure challenge.

Blood pressure medication

If your blood pressure is very high, or making changes to your lifestyle doesn't lower it enough, your doctor might suggest that you take **medication** to control it and lower your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

Because you don't normally feel or notice high blood pressure, it can be easy to forget to take your medication. But because it will help cut your risk, it's very important to take it in the way your doctor tells you.

If you're already taking medication for high blood pressure, you should still eat well and be active, to keep your risk of a heart attack or stroke as low as it can be.

Bettina's success story

"When the doctor told me I had high blood pressure, at first I wanted to deny it – I just didn't want to know.

But I decided to take control of my life.

I took my medication.

I started going to aerobics every week.

I changed the way I cooked. Instead of cooking Jamaican rice and peas with coconut milk, I used natural yoghurt.

I really cut down on the salt. Instead I use herbs and spices as seasoning. I only use salt to deal with snow or ice now!

My blood pressure became stable and began to drop.

Now I'm looking forward to a healthy future."

Find out more at **bhf.org.uk/ten**

Find out more

To find out more about blood pressure and eating well, being active, and giving up smoking, go to **bhf.org.uk/ten** or ring the BHF Heart Helpline on **0300 330 3311**.

Lines are open 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday at a similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.

Your doctor or nurse should also be able to give you more information about things you can do to help lower your blood pressure.

Join us in the fight for every heartbeat

For 50 years the British Heart Foundation has been funding life-saving heart research.

From babies with heart problems to the mums, dads and grandparents who survive a heart attack, so many people need our help.

But we need your support to continue the fight against heart disease. Visit **bhf.org.uk** to make a donation or find out more.

10 MINUTES TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Your change challenge

British Heart Foundation

Coronary heart disease is the UK's single biggest killer.

For over 50 years we've pioneered research that's transformed the lives of people living with heart and circulatory conditions. Our work has been central to the discoveries of vital treatments that are changing the fight against heart disease.

But so many people still need our help.

From babies born with life-threatening heart problems to the many Mums, Dads and Grandparents who survive a heart attack and endure the daily battles of heart failure.

Join our fight for every heartbeat in the UK. Every pound raised, minute of your time and donation to our shops will help make a difference to people's lives.

FIGHT FOR EVERY HEARTBEAT

bhf.org.uk

©British Heart Foundation 2014, registered charity in England and Wales (225971) and in Scotland (SC039426) Print code:

British Heart Foundation

10 MINUTES TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Your challenge

FIGHT FOR EVERY HEARTBEAT

bhf.org.uk

High blood pressure
Your 10 minute challenge

Take ten minutes every day for a week to find some areas that you could change to help lower your blood pressure.

You're in control. By taking the time to make small changes to your lifestyle, you can help keep your heart healthy – and change your life.

Day	Check the labels on your food: What foods did you eat this week that said they were high (red) for salt?	Get a move on: Make a note of any time you're active – anything from walking or gardening to swimming or team sports.	Think about drinks: Make a note of any alcoholic drinks you have
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

At the end of the week, look back over what you did and answer these questions.

Did you eat a lot of salty foods during the week?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Were you active every day?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Did you drink more than a standard glass of wine, pint of lager or 2 measures of spirits in one day?	☐ Yes	☐ No

Choose an area that you're going to tackle to help lower your blood pressure. Then set yourself a goal and choose a date to complete it by.

Example: *I will check food labels at the supermarket and if something has a red label for salt I I will try and find something with an orange or green label.*

Target date: _____/_____/_____