

High blood pressure

High blood pressure (hypertension) (usually presents with no signs or symptoms, so the only way to know if you have the condition is to have yours measured. However, a single high reading does not necessarily mean you have high blood pressure. Many things can affect your blood pressure through the day, so your doctor will take a number of readings to see if it stays high over time.

You probably have high blood pressure if your blood pressure readings are consistently 140 over 90, or higher, over a number of weeks.

High blood pressure puts extra strain on your heart and blood vessels. Over time, this extra strain increases your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

High blood pressure can also cause heart and kidney disease, and is closely linked to some forms of dementia.

What causes high blood pressure?

For most people, there may be no single cause for their high blood pressure. In essence, there are some factors you cannot control and some that you can.

You are at greater risk of high blood pressure:

- As you get older. The effects of an unhealthy lifestyle build up and your blood pressure can increase with age.
- If you are of African-Caribbean and South Asian descent.
- If other members of your family have, or have had, high blood pressure.

Your lifestyle can also affect your risk of developing the condition. You are at a higher risk if:

- You are overweight
- You are not active enough
- You eat too much salt
- You don't eat enough fruit and vegetables
- You drink too much alcohol.

Some people may have high blood pressure that is linked to another medical condition, such as kidney problems. For these people, treating the medical problem may lower their blood pressure back to normal.

You can help to lower your blood pressure – and your risk of stroke and heart attack – by making lifestyle changes.

Losing weight and increasing your physical activity will lower the risk of developing it, but if you already have the condition it can lower your blood pressure and reduce the medication that you have to take.

A 10kg weight loss can significantly lower your blood pressure if you have hypertension.

Increasing the amount of exercise that you do can lower your blood pressure, and the more exercise you do, the greater the effect.

References

<http://www.bpassoc.org.uk> available on 26/7/2010

Aucott L et al. (2005) *Effects of Weight Loss in Overweight/Obese Individuals and Long-Term Hypertension Outcomes* Hypertension; 45:1035.

Yancy WS et al. (2010) *A Randomized Trial of a Low-Carbohydrate Diet vs Orlistat Plus a Low-Fat Diet for Weight Loss.* Archives of Internal Medicine. 2010; 170(2):136-145.

Vieçili PR et al. (2009) *Dose-response curve to exercise in hypertensive individuals: analysis of the number of sessions to the hypotensive effect* Arq Bras Cardiol. May; 92(5):361-7, 378-84, 393-9.