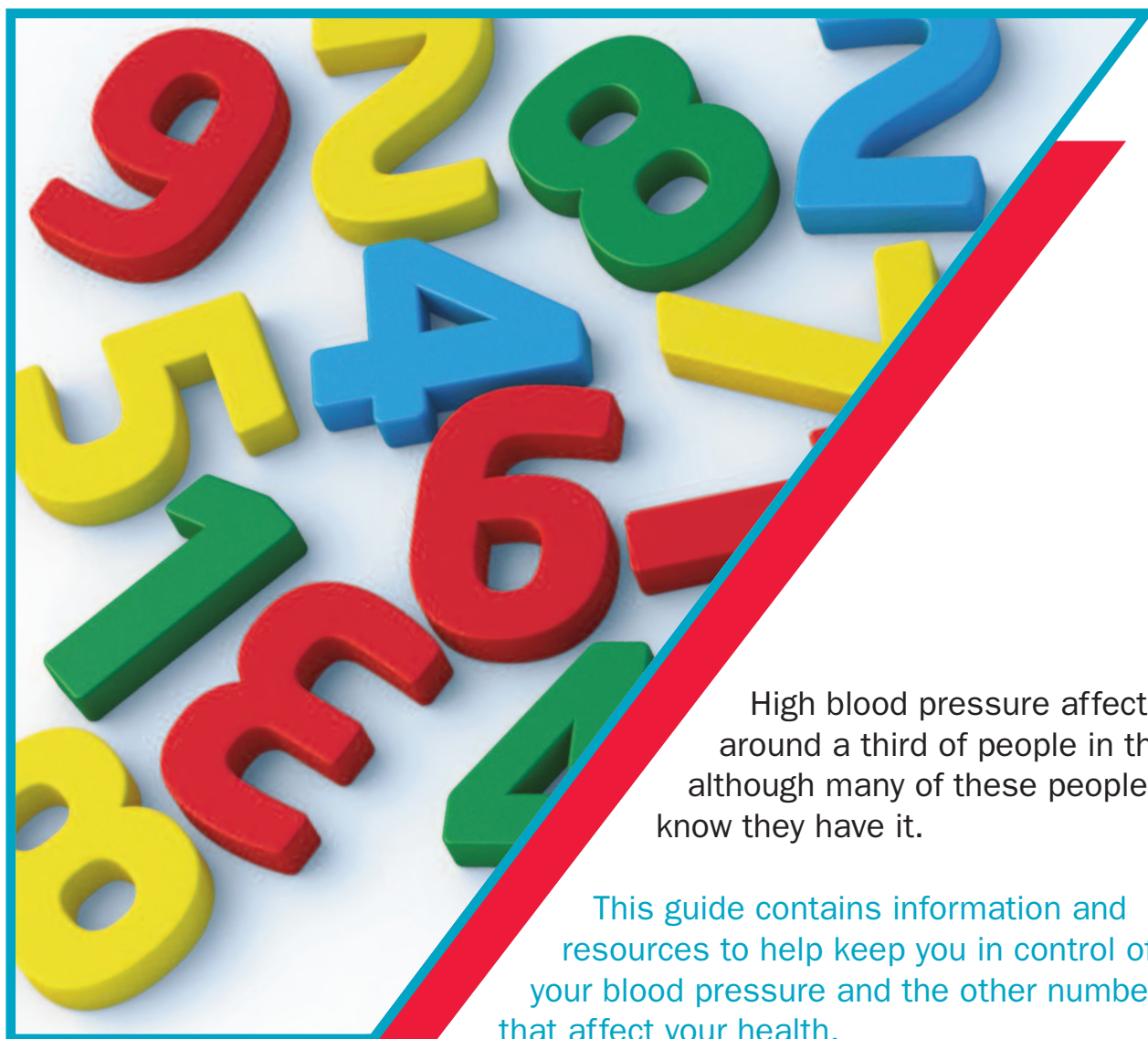


# Do you know your numbers? /



High blood pressure affects around a third of people in the UK, although many of these people don't know they have it.

This guide contains information and resources to help keep you in control of your blood pressure and the other numbers that affect your health.



PPP HEALTHCARE

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# Introduction

High blood pressure is a very common medical condition that affects around a third of people in the UK, although many of these people don't know they have it. High blood pressure isn't dangerous in itself but, if it's left untreated it can lead to very serious conditions, heart attacks and strokes. The good news is that it can be treated, and there are many things you can do to manage it and to lower the risk of getting it in the first place.

This pack is divided into three sections:

**Section 1** gives you an overview of blood pressure and what it is. It will give you information on the symptoms, the risks and how it can be diagnosed.

**Section 2** is all about the other numbers that affect your blood pressure and ultimately your health. Understanding your other numbers is the first step to making positive changes.

**Section 3** gives you suggestions and tips for improving your numbers. There are many small lifestyle changes that can make a big difference to your health.

## Section 1: Knowing your blood pressure numbers

High blood pressure is known as the ‘silent killer’ as it’s usually symptomless, so people don’t notice that anything is wrong. The only way to find out your blood pressure is to have it regularly checked.

This section looks at the following aspects of blood pressure and how they can affect you:

- What is blood pressure?
- What are the risks?
- How is it diagnosed?



# Section 1: Knowing your blood pressure numbers



## What is a normal blood pressure level?

An individual's blood pressure changes from minute to minute and varies from person to person so there is a fairly wide range which would be considered normal, but for a young person a typical resting reading would be 120 systolic over 80 diastolic (120/80). A normal resting blood pressure for someone older would be slightly higher. For example, 135/80 would be quite normal for a 50-year-old person. Your blood pressure usually falls slightly when you are asleep and may become high when you're under stress.

Generally a blood pressure of 140/90 or more is considered as high blood pressure. However the level at which you will be diagnosed as having high blood pressure and the level at which you are treated varies according to other health factors.

For example, if you are diabetic, or if there are signs that your level of blood pressure is affecting other important organs such as your kidneys or heart.

## What is blood pressure?

'Blood pressure' is the term used to describe the pressure within the arteries that moves blood from your heart around your body. The pressure of the blood flowing through your arteries changes when your heart is pumping and when it is resting. The pressure in your arteries will be at its highest when your heart is pumping and lowest as it relaxes before it pumps again.

Doctors record blood pressure readings in the form of two numbers eg 120/80. The first figure is the blood pressure measured during the moment when the heart is contracting and actively pushing blood out. This is called the 'systolic' pressure. The second figure is the pressure during the time when the heart is filling up with blood ready for the next beat. This is called the 'diastolic' pressure. The pressures are measured in millimetres (mm) of mercury.

## What is high blood pressure?

Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure. This is a very common condition with as many as five million undiagnosed people in the UK.

In 95 per cent of people with high blood pressure the cause is unknown. In these cases, it is sometimes referred to as 'essential hypertension'. However, it does seem that heredity plays a large part.

Where a cause is found the condition is called 'secondary hypertension' as the high blood pressure is a secondary result of another condition.



## What is blood pressure? cont.

Causes of secondary hypertension include:

- Taking some drugs such as the oral contraceptive pill or steroids.
- Certain diseases of the endocrine (hormone producing) system of the body, for example a disease called Cushing's disease which results in the over production of the body's own steroids.
- Some blood vessel diseases and, in particular, narrowing of the arteries to the kidneys.
- Kidney problems such as kidney failure, as the kidneys play a part in altering the level of someone's blood pressure.

## What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

Most people with high blood pressure have no symptoms at all, although occasionally it can cause headache or visual disturbance but usually only if the pressure is very high. A headache is far more likely to be caused by something else such as stress, migraine or another medical condition.

Since high blood pressure is usually symptomless it often goes undetected and therefore it is advisable for every adult to have his or her blood pressure measured at least every five years.

### Did you know?

Healthy adults aged over 40 should have their blood pressure checked at least once every five years.

## Section 1: Knowing your blood pressure numbers



### What are the risks?

The higher your blood pressure, the higher your risk of serious health problems in the future. High blood pressure can affect your body in a number of ways.

#### Your heart

If you have high blood pressure it means your heart is working harder to pump blood around your body. This can cause your heart to become enlarged as a result of being overworked. Eventually, the heart gets weaker and cannot pump blood as effectively through your body. As a result of this you can suffer from angina, stroke, heart failure and atrial fibrillation (irregular heart beat).

#### Your brain

Uncontrolled high blood pressure can cause problems by damaging and narrowing the blood vessels in your brain. Over time, this raises the risk of a blood vessel becoming blocked or bursting.

If blood cannot carry energy and oxygen to a part of the brain due to a blocked or burst blood vessel, some cells in the brain may be damaged, or even die.

This damage can sometimes affect a person's memory, thinking, or language skills.

#### Your kidneys

High blood pressure can cause kidney disease and damage to your kidneys can raise your blood pressure. Both your blood pressure and kidneys have an equal effect on each other.

Your kidneys have a very important role in removing waste products from your body so it's essential that you keep your blood pressure under control to reduce kidney disease, and to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

#### Your limbs and eyes

If high blood pressure is left untreated for a long time, it can put extra strain on the arteries in your arms and legs and may cause the blood vessels in the legs to narrow, causing painful cramps. The narrowing of these vessels can lead to poor circulation. These problems are known as peripheral artery disease (PAD).

High blood pressure can also cause the small blood vessels in the back of your eye to thicken, narrow or burst causing ongoing sight problems.



## Section 1: Knowing your blood pressure numbers



### Getting checked by your GP

When high blood pressure is diagnosed by a GP or a nurse it involves using a sphygmomanometer. Most people recognise this as a device on the GP's desk which involves inflating a cuff and slowly deflating the cuff on the upper arm.

Hearing how your pulse beats after the cuff is released allows a measurement to be taken on the mercury scale, giving an accurate reading of your blood pressure.

Many GP surgeries now use digital sphygmomanometers, which measures your pulse using electrical sensors.

### Home testing kits

Portable testing kits that measure your blood pressure at home or on the move can be a useful way of getting a more accurate reading. They enable you to see what your blood pressure levels are like when you're relaxed and not in the environment of the GP's surgery.

You can buy a variety of testing kits so you can monitor your blood pressure at home.

### How is it diagnosed?

High blood pressure (hypertension) can only be diagnosed if you have it checked. Detecting and treating high blood pressure is important because when left uncontrolled people will have a greater than normal risk of developing strokes, heart disease and kidney disease.

### Before your blood pressure is checked

Before having your blood pressure taken, you should rest for at least five minutes and empty your bladder. To get an accurate blood pressure reading, you should be sitting down and not talking when the reading is taken. Usually several separate measurements will be done before a diagnosis of high blood pressure is made.

### Are any other tests done?

If your GP feels that further results are needed to establish whether you have high blood pressure then they may arrange for blood tests, possibly an ECG (heart trace) and dipstick testing of a urine sample.

The tests may be carried out to check for causes of secondary hypertension or to look for other factors which may help to decide whether or not to treat the blood pressure. This can be a useful way for your GP to decide the most suitable medication for you.





## How is it diagnosed? cont.

### Controlling your blood pressure with medication

Following a healthy lifestyle can be a great way to take control of your own blood pressure and help bring it down to a normal level. Both poor diet and lack of exercise can be contributing factors and by controlling these early you may be able to prevent your blood pressure from rising. There are occasions, however, when blood pressure can't be controlled by diet and exercise and for these cases there is a wide range of medication available that will help control blood pressure. It's not uncommon to have to take more than one type of medication to treat your blood pressure effectively.

Different types of blood pressure medication work better in some people than others. What works well for a friend or relative may not work so well for you.

In some cases medication to lower your blood pressure may need to be taken indefinitely, however if your blood pressure levels stay under control for several years you may be able to stop your treatment.

Most medications used to treat blood pressure can produce side effects but the large choice of medications available means that these can often be resolved by changing treatments.

If you're experiencing any of the following common side effects while taking medication you should consult your GP:

- feeling drowsy
- pain around your kidney area (on the side of your lower back)
- a dry cough
- dizziness, faintness or feeling light headed
- a skin rash

Below are some of the more widely used blood pressure treatments. When planning the most effective treatment your GP will consider your ethnic background as different treatments work better for different ethnic groups.

#### ACE inhibitors

Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors reduce blood pressure by relaxing your blood vessels. The most common side effect is a persistent dry cough.

ACE inhibitors can cause unpredictable effects if taken with other medications, including some over-the-counter ones. Check with your GP or pharmacist before taking anything in combination with this medication.

#### Calcium channel blockers

Calcium channel blockers keep calcium from entering the muscle cells of the heart and blood vessels. This widens your arteries (large blood vessels) and reduces your blood pressure.

Drinking grapefruit juice while taking some types of calcium blockers can increase your risk of side effects.

#### Diuretics

Sometimes known as water pills, diuretics work by flushing excess water and salt from the body through urine.

#### Beta-blockers

Beta-blockers work by making your heart beat more slowly and with less force, therefore reducing blood pressure.

Beta-blockers can also interact with other medications, causing possible side effects. Check with your GP or pharmacist before taking other medications in combination with beta-blockers.

Don't suddenly stop taking beta-blockers without first consulting your GP. Stopping suddenly will lead to serious side effects, such as a rise in blood pressure or an angina attack.

#### Alpha-blockers

Alpha-blockers are not usually recommended as a first choice for lowering high blood pressure unless other treatments have not worked. Alpha-blockers work by relaxing your blood vessels, making it much easier for blood to flow through them.

Common side effects of alpha-blockers include:

- fainting spells when you first start the treatment
- dizziness
- headache
- swollen ankles
- tiredness

## Section 2: Understanding your other numbers

As well as our blood pressure there are many other numbers that are important to our health and wellbeing. Many of these can also contribute to high blood pressure. Do you know your vital numbers?

This section looks at the other numbers that can affect you:

- Your weight
- Your cholesterol
- Your blood sugar level



## Section 2: Understanding your other numbers



### Your weight

Being overweight or obese increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and some types of cancer. So keeping your weight down by exercise and healthy eating is a sensible precaution. There are a number of tools used to determine whether you are a healthy weight.

#### BMI

BMI is a measure of how healthy your weight is for your height.

You can calculate your BMI by using the following calculation or by using an online BMI calculator:

- Metric:  $BMI = \text{Weight (kg)} / \text{Height in metres}^2$
- Imperial:  $BMI = \text{Weight (lb)} \times 703 / \text{Height in inches}^2$

[www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthyweightcalculator.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthyweightcalculator.aspx)

If your BMI is 25 to 29.9, you are classed as overweight; if it's between 30 and 39.9, you are classed as obese; and anything above that is very obese.

### Waist measurement

Waist measurement is an important predictor of future health problems as storing excess fat around your middle can make you more prone to developing heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and cancer.

Your waist measurement should be taken half way between the top of your hip bone and the bottom of your rib cage.

	Ideal	High	Very high
<b>Women</b>	less than 80cm (32")	80cm to 88cm (32" to 35")	more than 88cm (35")
<b>Men</b>	less than 94cm (37")	94cm to 102cm (37" to 40")	more than 102cm (40")

### Waist to hip ratio

This is another tool used to measure the potential risk of obesity and cardiovascular disease.

To calculate your waist to hip ratio:

- 1) Measure your hips.
- 2) Measure your waist.
- 3) Divide the waist number by the hip number.

Or use our online hip to waist calculator:

[www.axapphealthcare.co.uk/waist](http://www.axapphealthcare.co.uk/waist)

A ratio of 1.0 or more in men or 0.85 or more in women indicates that you are carrying too much weight around your middle.

### Waist to height ratio (WHtR)

The waist to height ratio is used to measure your distribution of body fat. Higher values of WHtR indicate a higher risk of obesity related cardiovascular disease.

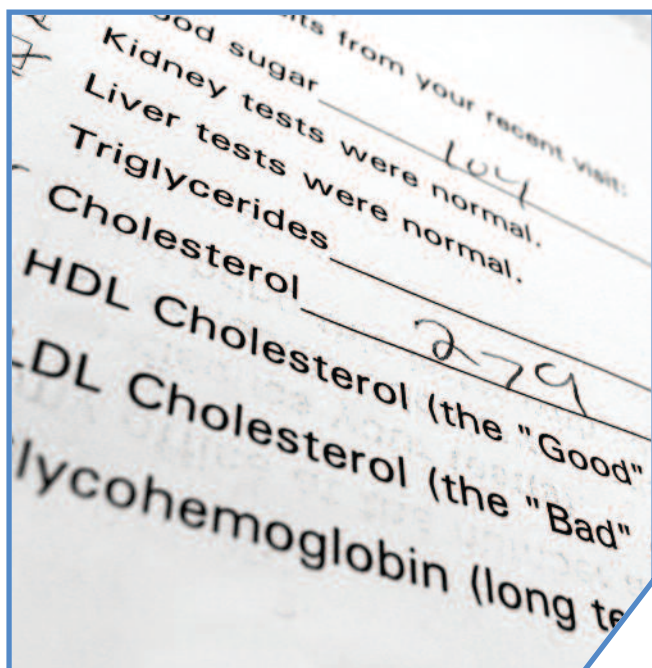
To calculate your waist to height ratio:

- 1) Measure your height
- 2) Measure your waist
- 3) Divide the waist number by the height number and x100

This will give you your waist to height ratio.

	Men	Women
Abnormally Slim to Underweight	less than 35	less than 35
Extremely Slim	35 to 43	35 to 42
Healthy	43 to 53	42 to 49
Overweight	53 to 58	49 to 54
Seriously Overweight	58 to 63	54 to 58
Extremely Obese	over 63	over 58

## Section 2: Understanding your other numbers



### Your cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fatty substance known as a lipid which forms part of the outer membrane that surrounds every cell. It's used to make nerve signals travel properly and hormones, which carry chemical signals around the body.

It is vital that we have enough cholesterol for our bodies to work properly. But too much cholesterol can cause our arteries to become blocked, increasing our risk of heart disease, stroke and kidney disease so it's important to get your levels checked.

The test can be done by your GP or practice nurse and is quick and painless.

Alternatively you can measure your own cholesterol levels using a home testing kit which you can find in any high street chemists.

#### What do the results mean?

There are two types of cholesterol, called low density lipoprotein (LDL), and high density lipoprotein (HDL). Your cholesterol result will tell you how much of each type you have in your blood.

- LDL is commonly known as 'bad' cholesterol. It carries cholesterol from the liver to the cells of the body. If there's too much LDL cholesterol in the blood, this can cause blocking of the arteries over time.
- HDL is commonly known as 'good' cholesterol. It carries cholesterol away from the cells and back to the liver, where it is broken down. HDL cholesterol can help to protect against developing blocked arteries.

Cholesterol levels vary from person to person. The Department of Health advises that adults should have:

- Total cholesterol lower than 5mmol/L
- LDL cholesterol lower than 3mmol/L

### Your blood sugar level

Blood sugar, or blood glucose level, refers to the amount of sugar in the blood. Blood sugar levels can vary depending on the foods we eat and the activities we undertake. Ideally, blood sugar levels should remain relatively stable, with the highest and lowest levels still remaining within a narrow range.

Out of control blood sugar levels can lead to serious short term problems such as hypoglycemia, hyperglycemia, or diabetic ketoacidosis. Long term, uncontrolled blood sugar can also damage the vessels that supply blood to important organs, like the heart, kidneys, eyes, and nerves.

#### How do I check my blood sugar?

You can measure your blood sugar levels simply and quickly with a home blood glucose level testing kit. All kits have at least two things: a measuring device and a strip. Put a small amount of blood on the strip and place the strip into the device. After about 30 seconds it will display the blood glucose level.

The ideal values are:

- 4 to 8mmol/l before meals
- less than 10mmol/l 90 minutes after a meal
- around 8mmol/l at bedtime.



## Section 3: Improving your numbers

Healthy numbers mean a healthy you and it is never too late to make changes to your lifestyle to turn bad numbers around. Even small changes in your physical activity, your nutrition, and your smoking habits can have a major impact on your health.

Once you understand what your numbers are, this section will give you suggestions and highlight the benefits of making lifestyle changes in the following areas:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Reducing your salt intake
- Limiting alcohol intake
- Exercising regularly
- Stopping smoking



## Section 3: Improving your numbers



### Maintain a healthy weight

Being overweight forces your heart to work harder to pump blood around your body, which can raise your blood pressure. Losing just a few pounds will make a big difference to your blood pressure and overall health.

We put on weight when the amount of calories we eat exceeds the amount of calories we burn through normal everyday activities and exercise. An average man needs about 2,500 calories a day and an average woman about 2,000 calories to stay the same weight.

The only way to lose weight healthily and keep it off is to make realistic, permanent changes to the way you eat and exercise. A few small alterations, such as eating less and choosing drinks that are lower in fat, sugar and alcohol, can help you to lose weight. There are also plenty of ways to make physical activity part of your life.

If you're overweight, aim to lose about 5-10% of your starting weight by losing 0.5kg-1kg (1lb-2lb) a week. You should be able to lose this amount if you eat about 500 to 600 calories fewer a day than you need.

The two key elements to a healthy diet are:

- Eat the right number of calories for how active you are, so that you balance the energy you consume with the energy you use. If you eat or drink too much, you'll put on weight. If you eat too little you'll lose weight.
- Eat a wide range of foods to ensure that you're getting a balanced diet and that your body is receiving all the nutrients it needs.

Simple steps to kickstart your weight loss

- **Reduce the amount of fat you eat.** Trim the fat off meat, drink skimmed or semi-skimmed milk instead of full fat, choose a reduced or low-fat spread and replace cream with low fat yoghurt.
- **Eat wholegrain foods.** Wholemeal bread, brown rice and pasta are digested more slowly than the white alternatives, so will help you feel full for longer.
- **Don't skip breakfast.** A healthy breakfast will give you the energy you need to start the day, and there is also evidence that people who eat breakfast regularly are less likely to be overweight.
- **5 a day.** Aim to eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day. Use our online calculator to work out if your 5 a day portions are big enough:  
[www.axapphealthcare.co.uk/5aday](http://www.axapphealthcare.co.uk/5aday)
- **Stay hydrated.** If you feel like a snack, try having a drink first, such as a glass of water or cup of tea. Often we think we're hungry when actually we're thirsty.
- **Swap drinks that are high in calories for lower calorie alternatives.** Don't forget that alcohol is high in calories, so cutting down on alcohol can help you to control your weight.
- **Get active.** Find ways to include more activity in your life.
- **Read the labels.** Take time to read the food labels when you're shopping to help you choose the healthier option.



# Maintain a healthy weight cont.

## Food and drink swaps

Try these small changes when you have your next meal or drink, or when you open the cupboard or fridge for a snack.

### Breakfast

- Swap from whole milk to semi-skimmed, 1% fat or even skimmed milk.
- Swap a sugar-coated breakfast cereal for a wholegrain breakfast cereal such as porridge or shredded wholegrain wheat cereal, with no added sugar.
- Swap a sprinkle of sugar on your breakfast cereal for a topping of fresh or dried fruit, which counts towards one of your five a day.
- Swap full fat Greek yoghurt for fat free Greek yoghurt or natural low fat yoghurt.

### Lunch

- Swap white breads, bagels and muffins for wholegrain varieties.
- Swap butter and cheese in your jacket potato for reduced fat spread and reduced salt and sugar baked beans.
- Swap a tuna melt panini for a tuna salad sandwich on wholemeal bread, without mayo.
- Swap a cheddar cheese filling in your sandwich for reduced fat hard cheese.

### Dinner

- Swap creamy or cheesy sauces for tomato or vegetable based sauces on your pasta, meat or fish dishes.
- Swap mashed potato made with butter and whole milk for mash with low fat spread and a lower fat milk such as semi-skimmed, 1% fat or skimmed.
- Choose leaner cuts of meat, for example, swap streaky bacon for back bacon.
- Swap the frying pan for the grill when cooking meat.

### Drinks

- Swap your usual coffee made with whole milk to a 'skinny' coffee made with skimmed milk.
- Swap your cordial for a cordial with no added sugars.
- Swap a few of your sugary drinks for a glass of water.
- Swap hot chocolate made with whole milk and served with whipped cream for a hot chocolate made with skimmed milk and no cream.

### Snacks

- Swap a blueberry muffin for a currant bun on its own or with some reduced fat spread.
- Swap yoghurt coated raisins for plain raisins.
- Swap salted nuts for unsalted nuts.
- Swap cheese straws for rice cakes with lower fat cream cheese

(Source: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))



## Section 3: Improving your numbers



### Cutting down

There are many simple steps we can take to reduce the amount of salt we consume:

- Don't add salt at the table or during cooking. Sea salt and rock salt should also be avoided as these are just as high in salt.
- Other high salt flavour enhancers include stock cubes, gravy browning, soy sauce. Choose lower salt versions.
- Avoid ketchup, soy sauce, mustard, pickles and mayonnaise as these can all be high in salt.
- Food eaten outside the home (food bought in takeaways, workplace canteens, service stations, cafes and restaurants) is often high in salt. Check labels or ask for a lower salt option.
- Many processed foods are high in salt, in fact three quarters of the salt we eat is hidden in processed foods, so try to cut down on these and switch to more fresh foods such as fish, chicken, meat, fruit and vegetables or check the label and choose a lower salt option.

### Eat less salt

One of the quickest ways to lower your blood pressure is to eat less salt.

Salt raises your blood pressure. The more salt you eat, the higher your blood pressure will be. Salt makes your body retain water. If you eat too much, the extra water stored in your body raises your blood pressure. There is also increasing evidence of a link between our current high salt intake and stomach cancer, osteoporosis, obesity, kidney stones and kidney disease.

#### How much is too much?

Most people in the UK eat too much salt without even realising it. About 75% of the salt we eat is already in the food we buy; only a small amount is added to our food at home.

A small amount of salt is essential to our wellbeing. Adults need about 1.4 grams and this can easily be obtained from eating a balanced diet. The recommended maximum salt intake for adults is 6g per day. However, most adults now eat between 7 to 10 grams per day, far more than needed.

### Change your flavours

There are many alternatives for adding flavour in place of salt:

- Add a splash of malt vinegar to vegetables instead of salt.
- Use balsamic, cider or rice vinegars on salads as an alternative dressing.
- Add fresh ginger, garlic, chilli and spring onions to your cooking to add more flavour.
- Marinate fish or meat prior to cooking.
- Add red wine when cooking stews or casseroles to enhance the flavour.
- Roast carrots and parsnips with cinnamon or mixed spice and a drizzle of honey.
- Steam vegetables lightly to retain the colour and taste and add a dash of lemon juice and freshly ground black pepper.
- Make your own gravy or use red wine sauce instead.
- Use an infused olive oil, e.g. garlic, basil, chilli or rosemary to sauté vegetables or as part of a salad dressing.
- Use lemon grass, fresh coriander and a small amount of sesame oil to flavour stir fries instead of soy sauce.

## Section 3: Improving your numbers



### Limit your alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol will raise your blood pressure over time. Alcohol also contains a lot of calories which will make you gain weight which will also increase your blood pressure.

If you regularly drink more than the recommended daily limits of alcohol (3 or 4 units of alcohol per day for men and 2 or 3 units per day for women), then cutting down may be good for both your mental and physical health.

In addition to the long term health benefits of drinking in moderation you may also find that you are:

- Feeling more alert and refreshed in the mornings
- Concentrating better at work
- Feeling happier and more positive
- Having more energy during the day
- Looking healthier, with a clearer complexion
- Losing some weight, or at least you may stop gaining weight

Below are some suggestions to help you proactively reduce your alcohol consumption or stop altogether:

- **Have a goal.** Set yourself a goal based on what you want to achieve – this could be stopping altogether or aiming to only have alcohol at the weekend. Decide on a start date and stick to it.
- **Monitor your intake.** Keep a drink diary. Writing this on a regular basis will help you to work out how much you're drinking.
- **Understand your triggers.** Work out what situations you know will encourage you to drink and then look for alternatives - for example, if you're going out with friends suggest the cinema instead of the pub.
- **Divert yourself.** If you are in a social situation that involves alcohol, try to find something else to do while you drink, like chatting, playing darts, pool, or dancing. This will take your mind off your drinks and help you to slow down.
- **Find ways to relax.** Look for activities like swimming, yoga or going to the cinema, which will make you feel good and don't involve alcohol.
- **Celebrate successes.** Reward yourself for progress – this could be by buying yourself a small gift or by taking part in something you enjoy.
- **Don't be hard on yourself.** Remember real change takes time, so try not to beat yourself up if you have a set back! Take action and refocus.

Whether you are actively trying to cut down or not you will still benefit from reducing the amount you drink. Here are some tips to help you cut down without cutting it out:

- Try low-alcohol options – there are now a number of lower-strength beers available.
- Check the label. Many drinks' labels now tell you how many units they contain.
- Make your drinks last longer by adding mixers or water.
- Don't eat bar snacks like crisps and peanuts – the added salt will make you want to drink more, and will raise your blood pressure.
- If you drink at home, buy a measure so that you know how much you are drinking.
- Alternate your drinks. Pace yourself. Try drinking each drink more slowly or alternating alcoholic drinks with soft or low alcohol ones.

## Section 3: Improving your numbers



### Get active

Regular physical exercise can decrease your blood pressure and strengthen your heart. A stronger heart has the ability to pump more with less effort.

Adults should aim to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity at least 5 times a week. This doesn't have to mean joining a gym; you can easily find ways of being more active in your day-to-day life.

#### What type of activity?

Different kinds of exercise and activity have different effects on your body. If you have high blood pressure, you should try to focus on activities that will help your heart and blood vessels. Aerobic activity is the type that helps your heart the most.

Other forms of activity are less helpful. For example, you should not do any exercise that is very intensive for short periods of time, such as sprinting or weightlifting. These kinds of activities will quickly raise your blood pressure, and put unwanted strain on your heart and blood vessels.

#### Good for your blood pressure

- Cycling
- Brisk walking
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Mowing the lawn
- Tennis
- Jogging

#### Not good for your blood pressure\*

- Weight lifting
- Squash
- Skydiving
- Sprinting
- Scuba diving - you will need a certificate from your doctor

\* Talk to your doctor or nurse before starting any of these

#### Start slowly

If you have not been exercising regularly, you should start slowly. Warming up and cooling down are important and you should increase the intensity of workouts slowly.

If your blood pressure is very high, you should not start any new activity without consulting your doctor as it may be necessary to lower it with medication before you begin exercising.



Visit [www.axapp.co.uk/activity](http://www.axapp.co.uk/activity) to find ways of increasing the activity in your life.

Password: activity



## Section 3: Improving your numbers



### Time to quit

While smoking does not directly affect your blood pressure, it will cause your arteries to narrow - just as high blood pressure does. This puts you at much higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

So, if you smoke and have high blood pressure, your arteries will narrow much more quickly and your risk of a heart attack or stroke in the future is dramatically increased.

### Ready to stop?

Making the decision to stop smoking isn't always easy and the first few weeks can be challenging. However there are real benefits to achieving your goal and many resources available to help you along the way.

These are just some of the benefits of stopping smoking:

- You will increase your life expectancy by around seven to eight years.
- You will greatly reduce your chances of having a heart attack, cancer, Type 2 diabetes or a stroke.
- Increased energy levels, improved fitness and better looking skin, hair and nails.
- More confidence and self-esteem, knowing that you have had the determination and willpower to top.
- You, your clothes, your house and your car will smell much nicer.

- Fresher breath and whiter teeth. You may also notice that the formation of wrinkles around the eyes and mouth slows down.
- You'll be more attractive to others. It's been found that non-smokers are three times more appealing to the opposite sex than smokers.
- Your sex drive and fertility will improve. Quitting smoking improves the lining of the womb and can make men's sperm more potent.
- A heightened sense of taste and smell, meaning that foods will taste better and your favourite smells will be more intense.
- You won't have to stand outside offices, restaurants or sneak out of the cinema half way through the film.
- You will save money.

### Manage your cravings

As soon as you stop smoking, your body will begin a recovery process. It is during this period of time that you may start to experience both with withdrawal and recovery symptoms. These symptoms might include feeling tired, irritable and restless however it is important to remember that they will pass. Below are some practical tips that can help you during those first few hours and days:

- **Self awareness.** Get to know your own unique patterns of behaviour. Do you tend to associate a drink with a cigarette? Everyone has a different relationship with cigarettes and it is important to build an awareness of them before you can begin to take control. A cravings diary is a good way to help you do this.
- **Plan ahead.** As you build awareness of your own behavioural patterns, start to prepare for those times when you're most likely to reach for a cigarette. It is a good idea to know what distraction techniques you can use in advance, so that you can act immediately if the cravings start. These techniques can include moving to another room, taking a walk or calling a friend.
- **Talk to someone.** Some people like to talk to someone they know about their cravings, or how they feel. Others prefer to speak to someone they don't know, like a counsellor. Whichever feels right for you, ensure that you seek out supportive people who understand and will want you to succeed.
- **Set achievable goals.** Whether you've decided to cut down or stop completely, think in terms of hours or days (even minutes if the craving is particularly strong) rather than weeks. This makes your goal more realistic and therefore more achievable.

## Additional resources

- Blood Pressure Association: [www.bpassoc.org.uk](http://www.bpassoc.org.uk)
- British Heart Foundation: [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)
- Heart UK: [www.heartuk.org.uk](http://www.heartuk.org.uk)
- Heartline Association: [www.heartline.org.uk](http://www.heartline.org.uk)