

MANAGING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Many people with high blood pressure don't even know that they have it, due to the lack of symptoms associated with it. Knowing your blood pressure numbers is important, even when you're feeling fine or have no family history of heart or blood pressure issues.

Between 20 to 30 per cent of Australian adults have high blood pressure, and pills for this condition are among the most frequently prescribed medication. However, there are numerous effective diet, lifestyle and supplement strategies that can aid in decreasing and controlling blood pressure instead of or in combination with medication.

WHY IS MY BLOOD PRESSURE HIGH?

Blood pressure is sensitive to activities you may have done prior to having it checked, including:

- Exercise - if you dashed up some stairs to your appointment or had been rushing around before prior to having your blood pressure checked, your blood pressure can temporarily increase. Sit quietly for a few minutes to allow your heart rate to return to normal.
- Stress or anxiety - many people experience what is termed 'white coat syndrome' whereby their blood pressure increases due to having it taken by a doctor or someone unfamiliar; which initially produces a high reading.



WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

High blood pressure is one of the most common disorders affecting the heart and blood vessels. Blood pressure fluctuates depending on the time of the day and what you are doing, however, when blood pressure is consistently high it can potentially cause damage to your heart, brain and other important organs. The medical term for persistently high blood pressure is hypertension.

UNDERSTANDING A HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE READING?

A single high blood pressure reading does not necessarily mean that you have hypertension. However, if readings remain at 140 / 90 or above, over time your doctor will likely want you to begin a treatment program with blood pressure monitoring. Such a program almost always includes lifestyle changes and often prescription medication for those with blood pressure readings are consistently recorded at 140 / 90 or higher.



- Smoking - having a cigarette can increase your blood pressure for up to an hour after you have last smoked a cigarette.
- Alcohol and caffeine - both stimulants can increase blood pressure temporarily, with some people more sensitive than others to caffeine, in particular.



MODIFIABLE RISK FACTORS

The following lifestyle factors can be modified to influence and lower your blood pressure:

- Body weight and waist measurement
- Physical activity
- Healthy diet
- Low salt intake
- Stress management
- Alcohol consumption
- Smoking

NON-MODIFIABLE RISK FACTORS

Unfortunately there are factors that play a role in blood pressure outcomes that cannot be controlled by means of diet and lifestyle changes. These include:

- Genetics - hereditary high blood pressure or family history of premature mortality from heart disease increases your risk
- Age - as we age, our risk of high blood pressure increases
- Gender - men are at higher risk of high blood pressure than women

SELF-MONITORING BLOOD PRESSURE

Learning to self-monitor your blood pressure with an automated upper arm cuff can help motivate you to take control of your health. Talk to your doctor about home monitoring before getting started. Regular visits to your doctor are also likely to become part of your normal routine, and these visits will help to keep an eye on your blood pressure.

STRATEGIES TO LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE



> MONITOR YOUR WEIGHT

Blood pressure often increases as weight increases, so reducing overall weight is one of the most effective lifestyle changes for controlling blood pressure. Be wary of where on your body you carry most of your excess weight; a higher proportion around the waistline further increases your risk of high blood pressure and numerous other lifestyle diseases.



> MOTIVATE YOUR MOVEMENT!

Regular aerobic exercise lowers blood pressure by training the heart to use oxygen more efficiently, meaning it does not have to work as hard to pump blood around the body. Activities that actively stress your cardiovascular system and raise your heart rate are ideal, such as: brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, dancing, gym workouts or playing sport. Aim to achieve 30-60 minutes of exercise on most days of the week. Consistency is key too, as blood pressure can increase again if regular activity stops.

> QUIT SMOKING

On top of all the other dangers of smoking, every cigarette you smoke increases your blood pressure for up to an hour after you finish. Smoking throughout the day means your blood pressure may remain constantly high. People who quit smoking, regardless of age, reduce their blood pressure and substantially increase their life expectancy.

> MODERATE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Alcohol can be both good and bad for your health. In small amounts, it can potentially lower blood pressure, but these protective effects are lost if consumed in large amounts. Aim to regulate alcohol consumption in-line with drinking guidelines for Australian adults which recommend:

- no more than four standard drinks on any one day
- no more than 10 standard drinks per week
- at least two alcohol-free days per week



08 8354 9800



bookings@chg.net.au



www.chg.net.au



103 Henley Beach Rd Mile End
SA 5031

> REDUCE SALT INTAKE

The average Australian eats 5 to 10 times more salt than the body actually needs. Even if you don't add salt at the dinner table, it finds its way into snack foods, takeaways, restaurant meals, deli meats, cheeses and even cereal products. A small reduction in your sodium intake can be all it takes to reduce your blood pressure.

> ACHIEVE ENOUGH SLEEP

People who sleep 5 hours or less a night may be at higher risk of developing high blood pressure or worsening their already-high blood pressure. Ensure you have a good nighttime routine to wind down before sleeping, including avoiding television, computer and phone screens. Studies have also found links between people who have sleep apnoea and high blood pressure. If you suffer from excessive daytime tiredness, regular headaches or your partner persistently complains about your snoring, see your doctor about a potential sleep apnoea treatment.

> EAT HEALTHILY & NUTRITIOUSLY

Eating a diet rich in vegetables, fruits and wholegrains, and lower in saturated and trans fats is great for lowering blood pressure and improving your overall health and wellbeing. Include heart-friendly fats such as: avocado, olives, extra virgin olive oil, nuts, seeds and oily fish regularly too.

> INCREASE POTASSIUM

Increasing your intake of potassium-rich vegetables and fruits is an important strategy in lowering blood pressure. Good sources of potassium include: sweet potatoes, potato, leafy greens, beans, lentils, spinach, tomato, bananas and avocados.

> CHOOSE DARK CHOCOLATE

Dark chocolate contains flavanols that help to increase the elasticity of blood vessels. Select good quality varieties of dark chocolate that contain at least 70% cocoa to get the most benefit.

> PRACTICE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Chronic high stress is an important contributor to high blood pressure. Try to incorporate some relaxation techniques into your daily routine, such as: deep breathing, yoga, meditation or practicing gratitude and mindfulness. Making the time to relax and do things you enjoy can also help to alleviate stress.

> REDUCE CAFFEINE

Some people are more sensitive than others to the effects of caffeine. The role caffeine plays in blood pressure is still debatable; drinking caffeinated beverages can temporarily cause a spike in blood pressure but the long-term effects are still unclear. Reducing caffeine intake is a healthy precaution.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC (UPPER) Mm Hg	DIASTOLIC (LOWER) Mm Hg
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
Prehypertension	120 - 139	80 - 89
High Blood Pressure Stage 1	140 - 159	90 - 99
High Blood Pressure Stage 2	160 or higher	100 and higher

For more information, see your GP or visit www.heartfoundation.org.au



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