



Weight

Being over-weight has a strong association with high blood pressure and also increases the risk of respiratory disease, diabetes and gall bladder disease. In clinical studies, weight loss almost always causes a fall in blood pressure so if you are over-weight, follow a healthy diet to promote weight loss. Aim to lose 1 - 2lbs a week by following a healthy, well balanced diet.

Alcohol

Alcohol does have an effect on blood pressure so drink in moderation.

Exercise

Exercise helps to keep our bodies in good working order. It tones our muscles, helps maintain mental alertness, improves sleep, boosts energy levels and reduces stress. Although your blood pressure rises sharply while you are exercising, if you exercise regularly you will tend to be healthier and have lower blood pressure than people who don't exercise.



This literature is produced as an acknowledgement of the life and work of Desmond and Hildegard Atherton. Desmond worked as a GP in Coventry and Hildegard was a founder Trustee of Coventry Churches Housing Association (now Touchstone Housing Association) and The ExtraCare Charitable Trust. Desmond's strength and patience towards those in his care and Hildegard's commitment and support to our charity's work have influenced the development of well-being service that is now benefiting our residents.



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Take extra care of your
blood
pressure



What is blood pressure?

When doctors talk about blood pressure, they are referring to the pressure in the large blood vessels as your heart forces blood around your body. There are two pressures; the peak pressure is when the heart contracts and is called systolic and the lower pressure is when the heart relaxes and is called diastolic. So when you have your blood pressure taken, the two pressures are recorded.

The conventional method for measuring blood pressure still requires the use of a cuff which is wrapped around your upper arm and is connected to a pressure measuring device. When having a blood pressure taken you will sit down and the cuff will be applied at roughly the same level as your heart. It is important to relax as much as possible. Everyone's blood pressure is variable and if you are anxious or stressed your blood pressure may go up.

What is hypertension?

High blood pressure constitutes a health risk; the higher the pressure the greater the risk. If your pressure reading is consistently over 160/90 mmhg for at least two high readings, on three separate occasions, you will be told you have hypertension. Combined with other factors such as high cholesterol, a smoking habit or a family history of heart disease the risk to your health increases, so it is very worthwhile treating your hypertension.

Who gets hypertension?

High blood pressure is the most chronic medical condition in developed countries, affecting about 20% of the middle-aged population and around 50% of people over 60. About 5% of the adult population has hypertension that is moderate or severe.

What are the symptoms?

The vast majority of people have no symptoms and therefore this means that it can go unnoticed for some time. Current opinion is that everyone over 30 should have a routine blood pressure check.

Treatment

Should you require treatment, there is a wide choice of medication and this treatment is particularly effective in people aged 60-80 who, if not given medication, could face a high risk of having a stroke. But be reassured, drug treatment can largely prevent this happening and that is why it's important to continue taking medication as prescribed.



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Life styles

Blood pressure levels depend on a combination of genetic and inherited factors but the influences of our lifestyles are also critical. Research shows that roughly about half of all the variation in blood pressure between people is the result of our diet from early childhood and half is due to genetic factors. Let's look at some of the lifestyle factors that can affect our blood pressure.

Salt

Estimates suggest 10 - 25% of the UK adult population is susceptible to high blood pressure from too much salt in the diet, so it makes sense to reduce our salt intake to maintain a healthy diet. We only need 2gms of salt per day which can be obtained from natural levels. However, because salt is added to processed foods and we use salt to season, our daily intake can easily increase to as much as five times the amount we need.

Gradually reduce the amount of salt you add to your food; your taste buds should quickly adjust as the natural flavours come through. Try the following couple of tips: replace table salt with 'lo salt' and try using herbs and spices to flavour your food. Take care with condiments which have a high salt content.