

# Blood pressure and heart and circulatory diseases

This leaflet is for people with high blood pressure. High blood pressure can cause heart and circulatory diseases including heart attack or stroke. But there are simple things you can do to help bring your blood pressure down to a healthy level like eating better and taking medication.

**You need to act now – even if you feel fine.**

Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK, and high blood pressure is one of the most common causes for it. You need to make some changes to what you eat and how active you are to help bring your blood pressure back down.

UNDERSTANDING  
**BLOOD  
PRESSURE**

mmHg

to reduce your risk of heart  
and circulatory diseases





Many people don't know they have high blood pressure until they find themselves in hospital with a heart attack or stroke.



people in the UK have high blood pressure and don't know it.

Inside your arteries

# What is blood pressure?

Your heart pumps blood around your body to deliver oxygen and nutrients to your organs. Your blood pressure is the force your heart uses to pump blood around your body through the arteries.

You need some pressure to keep your blood moving. Your blood pressure naturally goes up and down, and it's fine for it to go up while you're moving about. It's when your overall blood pressure is always high, even when you are resting, that you need to do something about it.



Blood pressure is the measurement of force applied to artery walls

## How is my blood pressure measured?

When you have your blood pressure measured, your reading is written as two numbers. The first is when the pressure is at its highest (or systolic pressure), and the second at its lowest (or diastolic pressure). For example, your reading will be something like: 140/90 mmHg. mmHg is a unit for measuring blood pressure.

You'll be told something like '140 over 90'.



**Systolic pressure:** This is the highest level of your blood pressure – when your heart beats, it contracts to pump blood through your arteries.

**Diastolic pressure:** This is the lowest level of your blood pressure – when your heart relaxes between beats.

Your blood pressure should be under 140/90 mmHg.

# What is high blood pressure?

**Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure. It means your blood pressure is always too high.**

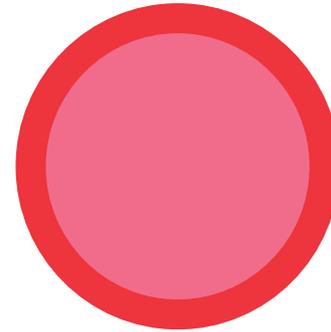
High blood pressure is serious. If you ignore it, it can lead to heart and circulatory diseases like heart attack or stroke. It can also cause kidney failure, heart failure and problems with your sight.

High blood pressure means that your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body, so the pressure is always higher than it should be.

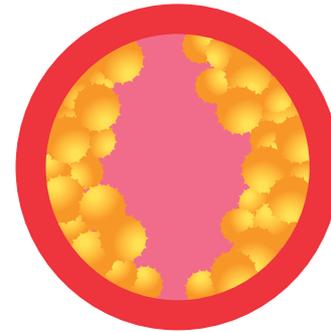
Your arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood to your organs) are stretchy to cope with your blood pressure going up and down. If you have high blood pressure, your arteries lose their stretchiness and become stiff or narrow.

The narrowing makes it easier for fatty material to clog them up. If the arteries that carry blood to your heart get damaged and clogged, it can lead to a heart attack. If this happens in the arteries that carry blood to your brain it can lead to a stroke.

## Inside the artery



Blood inside the artery

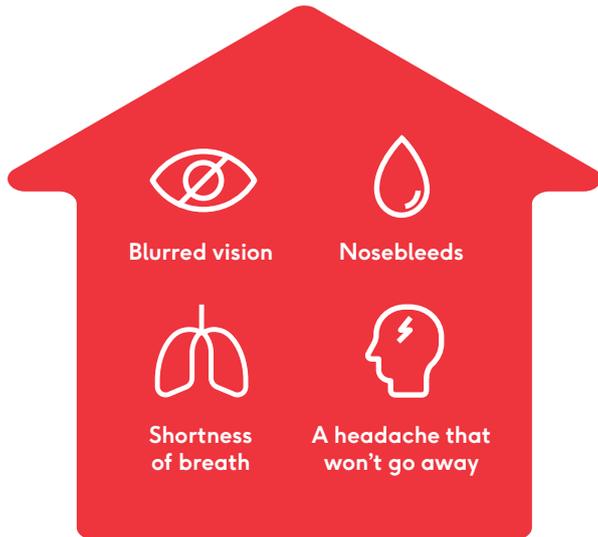


Atheroma (fatty material) narrows the artery, restricting the flow of blood

# Symptoms of high blood pressure

Many people with high blood pressure feel fine. More than 1 in 4 people have high blood pressure but many people don't realise they have it.

The following are symptoms of high blood pressure. But even if you feel fine, have your blood pressure checked regularly.



# Why do I have high blood pressure?

Most people get high blood pressure because of their diet, lifestyle or because they have a medical condition.

Sometimes high blood pressure runs in families and can also worsen with age. It is also more common if you are of black African or black Caribbean descent. Even in these cases, you can still improve your blood pressure by changing your diet and being active.

These can all increase your risk of getting high blood pressure



Drinking too much alcohol



Smoking



Being overweight



Not doing enough exercise



Eating too much salty food

# How to get your blood pressure down

You can reduce your chances of getting high blood pressure. Here are some of the ways to keep your blood pressure under control:



Eating less salt and more fruit and vegetables



Reducing how much alcohol you drink



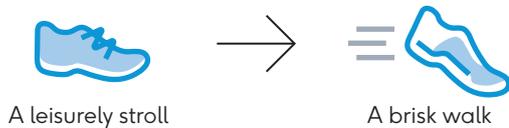
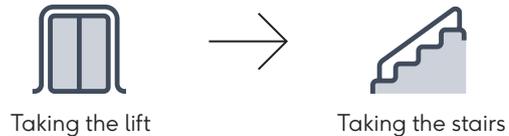
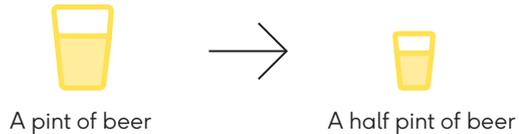
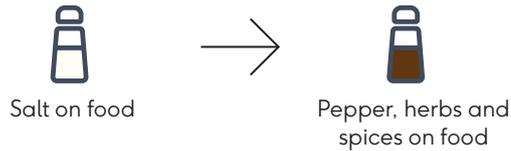
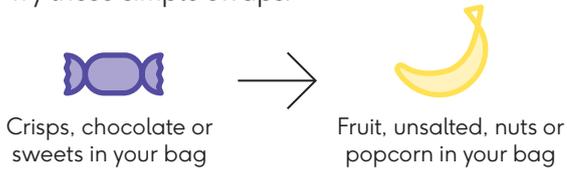
Being more active



Losing weight

# Build healthy habits

Try these simple swaps:



# Look at labels

You might be eating too much salt without putting it on your food. Around three quarters of the salt we eat has already been added to our food before we buy it. Checking food labels on the foods you buy can help you choose lower salt alternatives. Make sure you mostly eat things that are labelled green or amber for salt.

	FAT	SUGARS	SATURATES	SALTS
<b>LOW</b> Healthier choice	3g or less	5g or less	1.5g or less	0.3g or less
<b>MED</b> OK most of the time	3.1g to 17.5g	5.1g to 22.5g	1.6g to 5g	0.3g to 1.5g
<b>HIGH</b> Just occasionally	More than 17.5g	More than 22.5g	More than 5g	More than 1.5g

All measures as 100g



# Good to know

Eating more fruit and vegetables can help to lower your blood pressure. Aim for at least 5 portions a day.

Salt is salt. Whether it comes in crystals or grains, from the sea or the Himalayas – it's all salt and you need to limit it. The same goes for garlic or celery salts too.

# Get support

**If you are aged 40–74 you can ask for a NHS health check (England only). Your doctor should write to you every 5 years about this, but you can also just make an appointment to check your blood pressure.**

If you have high blood pressure, it's important to know that you're not alone. It's important to find support from the people around you and healthcare professionals. Make sure you check your blood pressure regularly so you can see your progress.

[bhf.org.uk](https://www.bhf.org.uk)

Heart transplants. Clot busting drugs. Pacemakers. Breakthroughs born from visionary medical research. Research you fund with your donations.

Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK. They cause heartbreak on every street. But if research can invent machines to restart hearts, fix arteries in newborn babies, build tiny devices to correct heartbeats, and give someone a heart they weren't born with – imagine what's next.

We fund research into all heart and circulatory diseases and their risk factors. Heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, vascular dementia, diabetes and many more. All connected, all under our microscope. Our research is the promise of future prevention, cures and treatments.

The promise to protect the people we love. Our children. Our parents. Our brothers. Our sisters. Our grandparents. Our closest friends.

You and the British Heart Foundation. Together, we will beat heartbreak forever.

**Beat heartbreak forever.**

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