

Blood Pressure



The Flora Project



What is blood pressure?

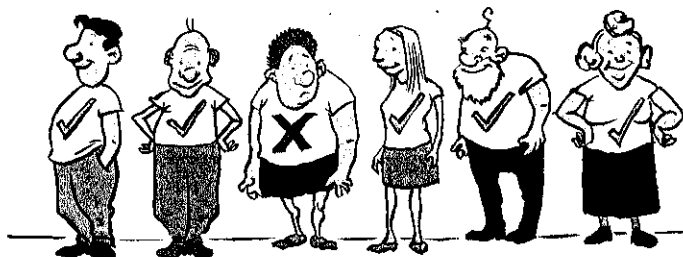
- Your heart is a muscular pump about the size of your fist.
- Every minute your heart beats about seventy times.
- We all have blood pressure - the pressure is created by the heart's constant pumping of blood around the body and the size of the blood vessels through which the blood passes.
- In a healthy young adult the normal blood pressure is around 120/80. (The higher figure refers to blood pressure during each heartbeat and the lower figure to your blood pressure between beats).
- Exercise, excitement, anger or anxiety all make your heart beat faster and increase your blood pressure temporarily.



Who can get high blood pressure?

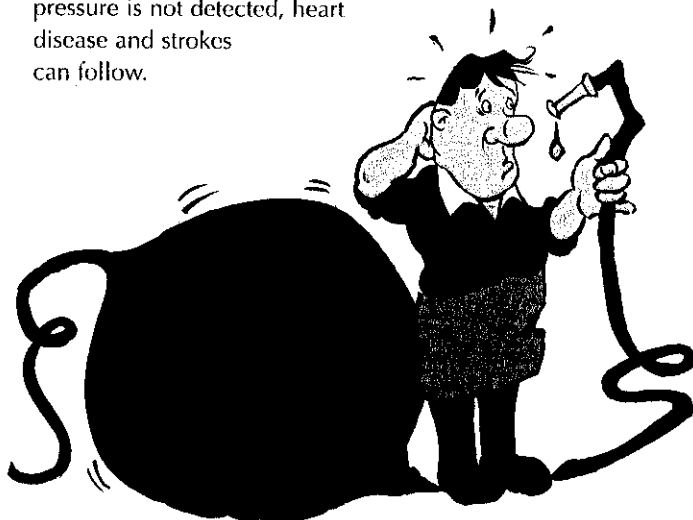
Unfortunately, high blood pressure is all too common - and it can run in families, so don't get complacent. It's worth asking your doctor for a check-up, especially if a relative is affected. It is a good idea to have your blood pressure checked regularly - at least once every 5 years.

There are many elements that contribute to high blood pressure such as being overweight, excessive alcohol consumption, lack of exercise, poor diet, stress, and the side effects of certain drugs and diseases.



What causes high blood pressure?

The main cause is narrowing of the arteries. It's a bit like when you water the garden with a hosepipe. If you stand on the hosepipe accidentally, the flow of water out of the pipe decreases and pressure builds up behind your foot. When the arteries narrow, the pressure in the blood system also increases in a similar way. If this abnormally high pressure is not detected, heart disease and strokes can follow.



Do I have high blood pressure - how can I tell?

There are usually no symptoms; the trouble with high blood pressure is that you can have it for a long time and not feel any different. Some people think headaches and tiredness are a sign of high blood pressure, but this is not always the case. Often it only shows when damage has already been caused. The only way you can tell if you have high blood pressure is by asking your family doctor for regular checks.



What are the effects?

Looked at simply, when blood is forced through arteries at high pressure, it's more likely to damage artery walls. The walls can become thicker and fat (cholesterol) may be deposited. Blood clots may form at these sites.

A heart attack occurs when a blood clot obstructs blood supply to the heart muscle and a stroke is when blood supply to part of the brain is cut off.

But, don't worry...

...there is evidence that the risk of all these problems drops when high blood pressure is properly treated.

Your doctor might decide that some of the simple measures shown overleaf are all that's needed to get your pressure down to normal.

Often a change of diet, reducing your weight, salt or alcohol intake or increased physical activity are enough to bring your blood pressure down.

Be Pro-active

Reduce the risks



Remember that blood pressure is one of several risk factors for heart disease - there are five others to bear in mind.

Collect all 6 leaflets in this series: **Smoking, Blood Pressure, Weight, Eating to Manage Your Cholesterol, Physical Activity and Stress and Relaxation.**

What you can do to reduce the risk of high blood pressure

Perhaps the most important thing is to watch your weight. Keeping weight down helps keep blood pressure down.

Try to limit alcoholic drinks. They are high in calories and can increase your blood pressure.

Try to limit your salt intake. Avoid eating excessive amounts of salty foods, replace salt in cooking with herbs and spices, and minimise the amount of salt added to your food at the table.

Regular physical activity helps control stress, helps keep your blood pressure normal and your whole system in tip top condition. Try to walk as much as possible and why not take the stairs instead of the lift? Be as active as you can (read our leaflet on physical activity).

Smoking temporarily raises your blood pressure. It also adds to the damage that high blood pressure may cause to your heart and blood vessels (read our leaflet on smoking).

If possible avoid situations which cause stress, anxiety or worry. You may manage to win an argument, but your blood pressure will soar.

Remember to have your blood pressure checked regularly - at least once every 5 years.

Learn to relax and not let life get you uptight - take a few deep breaths and keep it all in perspective (read our leaflet on stress and relaxation).

Planning for Change

Whilst reading this leaflet you may have found things which you feel you could change - why not record them here. Remember that it is easier to make one small change at a time than trying several big changes all at once. Make your changes simple and achievable.

I Will...

1.
2.
3.
4.

For more information...

...Speak to your family doctor or practice nurse

Or contact any of the organisations below:

British Heart Foundation, 14 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 4DH

Health Education Authority, Trevelyan House, 30 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 3HW

ASH - Action on Smoking and Health, 16 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 9PL

QUIT - The National Society for Non-Smokers, Victory House, 170 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 0HA

Sports Council, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0QP
Your Local Leisure Centre



The Flora Project

