



Hypertension Fact Sheet

High Blood Pressure - also known as hypertension - rarely makes people feel ill. One in every three adults in the UK has high blood pressure and about two in every three over 65's have it.

High blood pressure can cause headaches in a very small number of people, but only if their blood pressure is very high. Problems with sight, breathlessness and nose bleeds can occasionally be a sign of high blood pressure.

Many people who have high blood pressure don't have any symptoms at all, it very often goes undiagnosed. The only way of knowing if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure measured.

If you have high blood pressure, reducing your blood pressure can lower your risk of having problems such as a stroke or heart attack.

High blood pressure is more common among people of African-Caribbean and South Asian origin living in the UK. If you are of South Asian origin, you need to take particular care, because South Asians living in the UK are between three and five times more likely to have diabetes than the general UK population. This is important because having diabetes further increases the risk of developing high blood pressure and conditions such as angina, heart attack and stroke.

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood in your arteries, the tubes that take the blood away from your heart to the rest of your body. You need a certain amount of pressure to keep the blood flowing. High blood pressure develops if the walls of the larger arteries lose their natural elasticity and become rigid and the smaller blood vessels become narrower.

When you have your blood pressure taken your target is to have a blood pressure below 140/85mmHG (140 systolic and 85 diastolic). If you have diabetes, kidney disease or disease of the heart and circulation, your target is below 130/80mmHg.

There is no single definite cause of high blood pressure, however, the British Heart Foundation identifies the following as playing a part:

- Not doing enough physical activity
- Being overweight
- Having too much salt in your diet
- Drinking too much alcohol, and
- Not eating enough fruit and vegetables

Genes are another factor, so if one or both of your parents have hypertension, you have a greater chance of developing it too.

Take action today, visit your GP or Occupational Health department and ask to have your blood pressure checked. Take note of the list above and make a plan to change something, reduce your salt intake (cut down on bread, check your cereal, eat yoghurt and fruit for breakfast instead of bacon and sausage), keep a diary of your alcohol intake for 3 weeks and see if this needs attention, increase the amount and variety of vegetables that you have with your lunch and evening meal - enrol on a meditation/tai chi course.

A sample blood-pressure measurement

130mmHg

Systolic pressure – the pressure when the beat or contraction of the heart forces the blood around the body.

80mmHg

Diastolic pressure – the lowest pressure, which occurs between heartbeats when the heart is resting.