

### ♥ Eat less salt and more fruit and vegetables

It is the sodium in salt which causes the problems associated with high blood pressure. Seasalt, iodised salt, garlic salt and onion salt, all contain sodium and so they have the same effect on your health as common table salt. Salt is also found in processed foods.

To make sure that your blood pressure stays at a healthy level, reduce the amount of salt you add to your food at the table and eat less processed foods. Include more fresh vegetables, fruit and wholegrain cereals in your diet.

Eating less fat and fatty foods will also help to keep your cholesterol at a healthy level - another important way to reduce your risk of heart disease.

### ♥ Drink less alcohol

Small amounts of alcohol may provide some protection against heart disease. Drinking large amounts of alcohol can increase blood pressure and may damage the liver and heart.

If you do drink, spread your drinking over the week, keep some days alcohol-free and do not drink more than the recommended upper limits:

For men 21 standard drinks a week.

For women 14 standard drinks a week.

- 1 standard drink (10 grams of alcohol)
- = one half pint of beer, stout or lager
- = one small glass of wine
- = one glass of spirits (whiskey, vodka or gin)

Remember that alcohol is a drug and may be a risk for other health problems.

### ♥ Be more active

Long-term regular physical activity can lower your blood pressure and help to control your weight. Physical activity is also a great way to reduce stress and help you feel good! If you have very high blood pressure, consult your doctor before you start doing any form of activity.

### ♥ Relax

Stress will cause a short-term rise in your blood pressure. However, its long-term effect is more difficult to work out.

Learning to relax and cope with stress can benefit you in many ways and may help to keep your blood pressure levels low.

### ♥ Other risks

Smoking and high blood pressure are two serious factors that can cause a heart attack or stroke. You can greatly reduce this risk by immediately stopping smoking. There are now many aids available to help you stop and you can get advice from your family doctor, pharmacist, health board or you can phone the national Quitline at 1850 201 203. If you are not ready to stop smoking, try to reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke and plan to quit.

A high cholesterol is often associated with high blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure you should have your cholesterol checked by your doctor.

Diabetes can also be associated with high blood pressure and your doctor will test your urine (or blood) for sugar.

### Check your blood pressure

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it measured. Have your blood pressure checked regularly by your family doctor. If you are prescribed medication for high blood pressure, always follow the instructions.

### For a healthy level of blood pressure:

- ♥ aim for a healthy weight;
- ♥ eat less salt and more fruit and vegetables;
- ♥ drink less alcohol;
- ♥ be more physically active every day.

### Local contact:

For more information contact:

**Your local health board**

or

**The Irish Heart Foundation,**  
4 Clyde Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.  
Phone: 01 6685001  
Email: [info@irishheart.ie](mailto:info@irishheart.ie)  
Website: [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

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# what is blood pressure all about?



## What is blood pressure?

Everyone has blood pressure. It shows the amount of work that your heart has to do to pump blood around the body.

Two numbers measure the level of blood pressure. One number records blood pressure when the pressure is at its highest as the heart muscle squeezes out the blood from the heart - this is called systolic pressure. Then the heart relaxes, which allows the blood to flow back into the heart - this is called diastolic pressure.

120  
80

The normal level of blood pressure is usually about 120 (systolic) over 80 (diastolic), but this can vary with age, how you feel and activity. If you have been told that your blood pressure is higher than 140 over 90 you should discuss this with your family doctor.

## How do I know if my blood pressure is high?

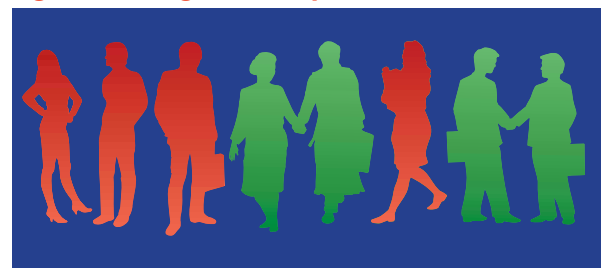
The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to have it measured. Blood pressure varies with age and depends on how active you are before it is measured.

If you are nervous or anxious, the measurement can be higher than usual.

One high reading does not necessarily mean that you have seriously high blood pressure. Your doctor will usually want to check your blood pressure several times, before deciding whether or not the pressure is really above the level which would be best for your age.

Sometimes, your blood pressure may be falsely high when measured by a doctor or nurse because you are worried about being in the surgery or clinic. If that is the case, your doctor may ask you to measure your blood pressure at home using a simple device. There is also a machine that can measure your blood pressure every half hour throughout the day and night. This can be done while you are carrying out your normal daily work and activities over a 24-hour period.

*About half of Irish adults over 50 years of age have high blood pressure.*



**If you are over 30, you should have your blood pressure checked every two or three years.**

## So what if I have high blood pressure?

A person with high blood pressure feels well, looks well and rarely has any symptoms. However, high blood pressure makes the heart and arteries work harder, causing damage over the years. This can lead to a heart attack or stroke at an earlier age than people with normal blood pressure. Fortunately, treatment can reverse most of these effects.

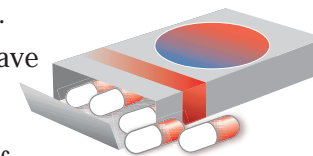
In mild or borderline cases, the doctor may recommend the following changes to your lifestyle:

- ♥ be more physically active
- ♥ be a healthy weight
- ♥ if you smoke, stop smoking
- ♥ eat a low-fat and low-salt diet
- ♥ drink less alcohol.

This may be enough to keep blood pressure at a reasonable level.

Other people may have to take medication.

The number and type of tablet varies from one person to the next, and depends on how the blood pressure responds to the treatment.



**If you have been prescribed medication for high blood pressure, you will usually have to take it for the rest of your life. On the positive side, the risk of a stroke or heart attack is greatly reduced. Medication that lowers blood pressure prevents early ageing of the heart and blood vessels.**

## What causes high blood pressure?

There is often no single cause of high blood pressure. A number of factors combine to raise blood pressure and high blood pressure tends to run in families.

Being overweight, drinking too much alcohol, eating too much sodium (found in salt) and not eating enough fresh fruit and vegetables may lead to an increase in blood pressure. As you grow older, your blood pressure increases.

Contrary to popular opinion, high blood pressure is not a disease of the nervous or highly strung person, nor is it caused by a stressful lifestyle. In a very small number of people, there is a specific cause for high blood pressure, and removing the cause can produce a 'cure'. Your doctor will know when to look out for signs of these rare conditions.

## What do I do to reduce high blood pressure?

A healthy lifestyle can help to keep down blood pressure levels. This is particularly important if you have been told that you have high blood pressure.

### ♥ Aim for a healthy weight

Keep your weight at a level that is right for your height and build.

