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## How to lower your blood pressure without medication

More than 1 in 4 adults have high blood pressure (hypertension), a condition that can lead to kidney damage, stroke and heart disease. It's important to get your blood pressure checked regularly. But if you've already been told yours is in the high region, these lifestyle tips can help you reduce it.

How is your blood pressure? More than 1 in 4 adults have high blood pressure but you may not know as it is often symptomless.

[High blood pressure](#) is dangerous because it increases the risk of [heart disease](#), heart attack, [strokes](#), [kidney disease](#) and vascular [dementia](#). Checking your numbers – which can be done at home with your own monitor, at some pharmacies, or as part of a consultation with your doctor – is the only way to know if it's in the healthy range.

GP Dr Jeff Foster explains: "Healthy blood pressure is desirable as it is the single most important modifiable risk factor in our lives. Prolonged high blood pressure causes damage to the inner lining of arteries which then allows plaques to form, furring up vessels and causing blockages – this is how people have heart attacks and strokes. High blood pressure can also weaken arteries causing risk of rupture. If this occurs in the brain, haemorrhagic stroke (a bleed into the brain) occurs."

Although high blood pressure is usually unnoticed in everyday health, Foster reveals [erectile dysfunction](#) can be a sign of hypertension.

"Once men have erectile dysfunction that is caused by damage to the arteries, it's estimated that within three years a significant heart or stroke risk occurs. It's a warning sign."

For this reason, men with ED should consult their doctor for an overall health check.

## What is healthy blood pressure?

A blood pressure reading consists of two figures. The higher number (called the systolic level) is a measure of the pressure inside your arteries when your heart is pumping blood out. While the lower figure (the diastolic level) measures the pressure inside your arteries when your heart rests between beats.

Defining what is 'healthy' is far harder than you might imagine.

For pretty much everyone, a blood pressure between 90/60 and 120/80 is healthy.

If your blood pressure is consistently above 140/90 in the GP's surgery, you will be defined as having high blood pressure. However, it's extremely common to have individual readings above this level even if you have healthy blood pressure – it's only consistently high blood pressure that counts.

And to make matters more complicated still, if you have a 24-hour blood pressure reading with a monitor from your doctor, or if you're looking at your average readings at home, an average above 135/85 counts as high.

For many people, a blood pressure consistently between 120/80 and 140/90 isn't a cause for concern. However, for some people, this is a sign that they are at risk of developing high blood pressure.

## Easy lifestyle changes that can help

If you have high blood pressure, or yours is heading in that direction, read on for tips for lowering it naturally. But if you are already on medication for the condition, don't stop taking it without speaking with your GP first.

Foster says: "We'd check someone's blood pressure after three to six months of lifestyle changes, to monitor any change."

### Watch the salt

Foster says: "We only need the tiniest amount of [salt](#) in our diets."

The recommended daily limit is around 5 g. Much of this is already in food we eat, such as bread, cheese, processed meats, ready meals and snacks like crisps. Try to avoid adding salt at the table but add flavour with herbs and spices instead.

### **Lose weight**

Being overweight is a key factor in high blood pressure. Even a small reduction of 10% of your body weight can make a difference.

### **Skip the nightcap**

[Alcohol](#) is a key factor in high blood pressure. Staying within the weekly limit of 14 units or fewer will help you maintain healthy blood pressure.

### **Exercise**

[Exercise](#) is beneficial for health and especially good for lowering blood pressure if you do it regularly. Even walking briskly for 10 minutes a day will help.

### **Stop smoking**

Smoking causes damage to blood vessels and organs and is another key factor in high blood pressure.

### **Get your 5 a day**

Adding more fibre to your diet in the form of fruit and vegetables will help your blood pressure and also reduce cholesterol. Aim for a minimum of [five daily portions](#), and ideally more.

### **Sleep better**

[Sleep problems](#) can be detrimental to health in the long term. There is evidence that lack of sleep or poor sleep quality can contribute to weight gain but also high blood pressure. Lifestyle changes like reducing alcohol and caffeine in the evenings, and taking exercise can all help sleep quality.

## **What next after lifestyle changes?**

"Some people," says Foster, "are predisposed genetically to high blood pressure. Radical lifestyle changes to weight and diet may help but not always."

Because high blood pressure increases the risks of so many illnesses, it's vital to control it.

Medication is the next step and, for anyone with very high blood pressure, may be started immediately when they see their doctor.

But a one-off 'high' reading doesn't necessarily mean you have hypertension. If your blood pressure is high when you see your doctor, you may be suffering from 'white coat syndrome'. This is where the stress of having your blood pressure tested causes it to increase temporarily. Doctors understand this so they may take your blood pressure for a second time shortly afterwards. Other options will include asking you to monitor it at home for a few days or they may supply you with a 24-hour blood pressure monitor. Once there is a clear picture of your blood pressure you may be prescribed drugs to control it.

There is a [range of blood pressure medications](#) available. It's important to remember that these won't make you feel better in the short term, and may cause side-effects. However, they are an insurance policy against you having a catastrophic stroke, so it's very important not to give up on them without a discussion with your GP.

It's a balance between controlling your blood pressure and reducing unwanted side-effects which can include tiredness, swollen ankles or cough. If one drug causes side-effects, your doctor may be able to switch you to another. Your age, ethnicity, lifestyle and any other health issues will be factors when your doctor chooses the right drugs.

## Prevention

High blood pressure is not inevitable in older age. Keeping regularly active, being a [healthy weight](#), avoiding smoking, and eating a healthy diet are all factors that will help keep it within the healthy range.

If you buy an approved blood pressure monitor to use at home, Foster suggests using it every six months or so if your blood pressure is usually within the normal range. If you have any concerns, or you are a man experiencing erectile dysfunction, don't be embarrassed but see your GP for a health check.

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