

High blood pressure and salt



Eating too much salt can increase the risk of hypertension because the sodium in salt makes your body retain more water, which leads to swelling of the ankles. The extra water in the blood vessels creates more pressure and the heart has to work harder to pump blood around our bodies.

Our kidneys remove excess sodium from the body. They help keep our blood pressure normal. Too much salt can gradually damage our kidneys making them become less able to remove the excess sodium.

You can get your daily recommended requirement from the natural salt in fresh foods. To avoid adding it to your diet:

- Do not add salt to your food at the table or to your cooking.
- Avoid manufactured or processed foods that have salt added, such as potato chips, sausages and canned soups or packet meals.
- Choose foods labelled 'no added salt', 'low salt' or 'salt reduced', including breads and cereals.

Important information

If you have kidney disease or are taking other medicines, consult your GP before changing your salt intake. Also, check with your GP before starting an exercise program. Exercises involving lifting heavy weights and body presses should be avoided by people with high blood pressure. If exercise causes you pain or discomfort, stop immediately and see a GP.



Blood Pressure and Your Health

Lowering your blood pressure by modifying your lifestyle and eating habits reduces your risk of cardiovascular disease, including having a fatal heart attack or stroke.

We aim to reduce death and disability from cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other health disorders related to obesity through research, clinical care, education and advocacy.

For more information contact Preventative Cardiology:

Freecall: 1800 670 695

Email: preventativecardiology@bakeridi.edu.au

Website: www.bakeridi.edu.au



Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute
75 Commercial Road, Melbourne 3004 VIC Australia
PO Box 6492, St Kilda Road Central, Melbourne 8008 VIC Australia

Disclaimer: While reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the material contained in this brochure, the information is provided on the basis that persons undertake responsibility for assessing the relevance and accuracy of its content. In particular, readers should seek independent professional medical advice from their general practitioner or specialist in relation to their own individual circumstance or condition before making any decisions based on the information in this brochure. The material also includes summarised guidelines or recommendations based on information provided by third parties. The Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute disclaims to the extent permitted by law, all liability including negligence for claims of losses, expenses, damages and costs that the reader may incur (or suffer) from acting on or refraining from action as a result of all information in this brochure.



The facts

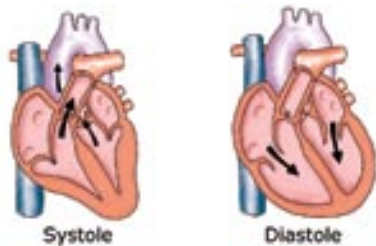
High blood pressure (hypertension) is a leading and highly preventable cause of illness and death due to cardiovascular disease. Almost one third of Australians aged over 50 years have high blood pressure and nearly one out of two Australians have high blood pressure before they reach 70 years of age.

What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pressing against the walls of the blood vessels (arteries) that deliver oxygen-rich blood from the heart to all parts of the body. Your heart contracts to force blood around the body and rests briefly between each heart beat. So, when someone takes your blood pressure, two measurements are obtained (e.g. 120/80 mmHg, said as “120 over 80”):

Systolic – pressure in the artery as the heart contracts. This is represented by the top, higher number (“120”).

Diastolic – pressure in the artery when the heart is relaxing and being filled with blood. This is represented by the bottom, lower number (“80”).



Hypertension occurs when the blood is being pumped through the arteries with more force than normal. High blood pressure usually does not give any warning signs; you can feel perfectly well yet still have high blood pressure.

Monitoring your blood pressure

Since you cannot see your blood pressure, it is important that you have regular checks if you are over 40 years of age, have a history of high blood pressure or any other risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

There is no ‘ideal’ blood pressure reading, however, the following values when your blood pressure is checked by a nurse or doctor can be used as a guide.

Diagnostic levels of blood pressure

Grade	Systolic (mmHg)	Diastolic (mmHg)
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
High normal	120-139	80-89
Mild hypertension	140-159	90-99
Moderate hypertension	160-179	100-109
Severe hypertension	Greater than or equal to 180	Greater than or equal to 110

*Based on the National Heart Foundation (2004) Hypertension Guidelines.

What causes high blood pressure?

For most people, there is no specific cause for high blood pressure but the risk of serious problems associated with high blood pressure is increased by:

- ☞ Smoking
- ☞ High blood cholesterol
- ☞ Being overweight
- ☞ Physical inactivity
- ☞ High salt intake
- ☞ Diabetes
- ☞ Family history of high blood pressure
- ☞ High alcohol intake

For a minority of cases (about 10%) high blood pressure is related to another medical condition.

Tips to control your blood pressure

It is recommended to:

- ☞ Have your **blood pressure checked** during routine visits to your doctor.
- ☞ Make **lifestyle changes** to exercise regularly (30 min per day of brisk walking), lose excess body fat for a healthy body weight, reduce your alcohol intake to two or less drinks per day (men) or one per day (women), quit smoking and minimise physical and emotional stress by relaxation and thinking positively.
- ☞ Follow a **healthy eating pattern** that is low in saturated fat, cholesterol and salty foods. Eat lean meat, oily fish (e.g. salmon) and poultry. Eat more fruits, vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals, legumes, nuts and seeds. Include reduced fat dairy products or have added calcium soy drinks and select high monounsaturated margarine and unsaturated oils for cooking.

If diet and lifestyle changes are not enough to reduce your blood pressure, you may also require medicines. There are numerous blood pressure medicines and in some instances, a number of them may be required long term.

Reducing your blood pressure is good for the prevention of:

- ☞ Coronary artery disease
- ☞ Heart attack
- ☞ Stroke
- ☞ Heart failure
- ☞ Peripheral vascular disease
- ☞ Kidney disease