



High Blood Pressure – Hypertension

Hypertension HT is commonly called **high blood pressure**, nowadays (2005 on) defined as above 140/85 mm Hg; or if one is diabetic over 135/80.

About 38% of UK adults have hypertension. Correct treatment of hypertension reduces the risk of a heart attack by about 20% and reduces the risk of stroke by about 40%. Most people with hypertension need tablets to lower their blood pressure. Advice and treatment includes exercise, lifestyle changes, and/or diet changes, as well as drugs.

Possibly as many as 16 million UK people have high blood pressure; and the proportion of the population is slowly increasing over the years. About 5% have an obvious underlying cause such as kidney disease. Most of the rest have no single obvious cause. Associated factors include: being obese, too much alcohol, too much salt, stress, lack of exercise, poor diet, too little potassium, and family history of relatives with hypertension.

[Oily fish with omega-3](#) fatty acids are protective against high blood pressure and heart disease.

Hypertension – Why worry if you feel OK

High blood pressure does not necessarily make someone feel unwell, however if untreated it tends to cause damage to blood vessels and the heart. The link between hypertension and coronary heart disease and stroke is very well established.

Correct treatment of hypertension reduces the risk of a heart attack by about 20% and reduces the risk of stroke by about 40%. Here [risk](#) is based on the observed reduced occurrences in treated past patients. The purpose of treating hypertension is to prevent this damage to blood vessels and the heart from occurring and so help to prevent these illnesses.

Most people with hypertension need tablets to lower their blood pressure. Usually, they need to continue them for life. These tablets are very successful at preventing heart attacks and strokes and have very few side effects.

The majority of people do not have a *single* identifiable cause. Some have a genetic component, with hypertension tending to run in families. In addition there are environmental and lifestyle factors. The most important causes are: being overweight; too much salt in the diet, too much alcohol; and smoking.

Five self-help measures are suggested.

- Avoid being [overweight](#).
- [Reduce salt](#) intake.
- Keep [alcohol](#) down.
- [Exercise](#) can reduce your blood pressure and help to keep your weight down. Start slowly and build up, walking is excellent. Aim for 20 to 30 minutes activity at least three times a week. Or even better, walk for half an hour five times per week, which is better than more intense exercise for a shorter time.
- Don't [smoke](#).

First published in this form 2002, and updated 2005, 2007, 2008.

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