High blood pressure (hypertension) can lead to serious problems such as heart attack, stroke or kidney disease. High blood pressure usually does not have any symptoms, so it is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly by your doctor. Lifestyle changes are very important in managing high blood pressure. Ask your doctor for advice.

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood in the arteries as it is pumped around the body by the heart. Blood pressure does not stay the same all the time. It changes to meet your body’s needs. It is affected by various factors, including body position, breathing, emotional state, exercise and sleep.

If blood pressure remains high, it can lead to serious problems like heart attack, stroke, heart failure or kidney disease. The medical name for persistently high blood pressure is hypertension and the medical name for low blood pressure is hypotension.

Measuring blood pressure

Blood pressure is usually measured by wrapping an inflatable pressure cuff around your upper arm. This cuff is part of a machine called a sphygmomanometer. It is best to measure blood pressure when you are relaxed and sitting.

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers, such as 120/80. The larger number indicates the pressure in the arteries as the heart pumps out blood during each beat. This is called the systolic blood pressure. The lower number indicates the pressure as the heart relaxes before the next beat. This is called the diastolic blood pressure. Both are measured in units called millimetres of mercury (mmHg).

Variations in blood pressure

Your blood pressure changes to meet your body’s needs. If a reading is high, your doctor may measure your blood pressure again on several separate occasions to confirm the level. Your doctor may also recommend that you measure your blood pressure at home or have a 24-hour recording with a monitoring device.

Blood pressure readings

What is considered a healthy blood pressure varies from person to person. Your doctor will advise you about what your ideal blood pressure is based on your circumstances, including your overall health.

The following figures should only be used as a guide:

- optimal – less than 120 / less than 80
- normal – 120 to 129 / 80 to 84
- high-normal – 130 to 139 / 85 to 89
- high blood pressure – greater than 140/90.

High blood pressure usually does not give warning signs. You can have high blood pressure and feel perfectly well. The only way to find out if your blood pressure is high is to have it checked regularly by your doctor.

Low blood pressure is relative – what is low for one person may be okay for another – and is only considered a problem if it has a negative impact on your body or it affects the way you feel.

Regular blood-pressure checks

If your blood pressure is in the healthy range and you have no other risk factors for cardiovascular disease, and no personal or family history of high blood pressure, it is still important to have a check every two years and during routine visits to your doctor.

If your blood pressure is ‘high-normal’ (or higher), or if you have other risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as a personal or family history of high blood pressure, stroke or heart attack, it is best to have it checked more frequently. Ask your doctor for advice.

Managing high blood pressure

If your blood pressure remains high, it can lead to serious health problems. You will be more at risk of these problems if you:

- have unhealthy eating habits
- are overweight or obese
- are physically inactive
- smoke
Lifestyle changes are very important to help manage high blood pressure and lower your risk of cardiovascular disease. Suggestions include:

- Enjoy a wide variety of foods from the five food groups.
- Decrease your salt (sodium) intake. (Salt is a mineral and is made up of sodium and chloride, but it’s the sodium in salt that is bad for your health. Although health professionals talk about salt, it is the sodium that is listed on food labels in supermarkets that it is important to keep track of.)
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Be moderately physically active for 30 to 45 minutes per day, five days or more in the week. Alternatively you can aim for vigorous activity (activity that makes you huff and puff) for 15 to 30 minutes, five or more days of the week.
- Limit your alcohol intake to no more than two standard drinks on any day.
- Quit smoking.

Some people may also need medicine to manage high blood pressure, but it is still important for them to make lifestyle changes too.

**High blood pressure and daily activity**

Check with your doctor before starting a new activity or increasing your level or intensity. Be active safely. Build up your levels of activity gradually.

Try to do at least 30 to 45 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. This can be done in bouts of 10 minutes or longer, if that is more convenient.

Physical activity is any form of bodily movement performed by our large muscle groups. Moderate-intensity physical activity (energetic activity that doesn’t make you overly breathless), such as brisk walking or cycling, is enough to provide health benefits.

Some types of exercises, such as body presses and lifting heavy weights, can actually raise your blood pressure. Avoid these if you have high blood pressure.

**High blood pressure and diet**

Following a diet that emphasises the intake of vegetables, fruits and whole grains, including low-fat dairy products, such as in the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, may be combined with exercise and weight loss to maximise blood pressure reduction.

Healthy eating is important in managing high blood pressure and reducing your risk of heart disease. Enjoying a variety of foods from the different food groups is the key to healthy eating. Every day, try to include:

- vegetables
- wholegrains
- lean meats
- oily fish
- fruit
- reduced-fat, low-fat or no-fat dairy products
- monounsaturated or polyunsaturated vegetable and seed oils
- nuts, seeds and legumes.

**Salt intake and high blood pressure**

Reducing the amount of salt you eat can also help to manage or even avoid high blood pressure. To help reduce your salt intake:

- Ensure your diet consists of wholefoods including, vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, lean meat and poultry, fish and seafood, legumes, nuts and seeds.
- Avoid foods such as pizzas, pastries, biscuits and take away foods as a whole, as they contribute large amounts of sodium to the diet and displace the intake of healthy foods, many of which are naturally low in sodium.
- Choose low-salt or reduced-salt food where available.
- Avoid adding salt to cooking or at the table – flavour meals with herbs and spices instead.

**Medications for high blood pressure**

There is a large variety of medicines available to lower and manage high blood pressure. Your doctor may call them ‘antihypertensives’.

These medications do not cure high blood pressure, but they do help manage it. Once you start to take medicines to manage your blood pressure, you may need to take them for the rest of your life. However, the dose of these medicines may change over time.

If you need to take medication, your doctor will advise you on the correct type and dose. Two or more different medications are often needed to manage blood pressure.

Make sure that you take your medicines regularly. Some things that may help you remember to take them include:

- taking them at the same time each day
- using a weekly pill box
- marking the time on your calendar
- asking a family member or friend to remind you
- always carrying a list of your medicines and their doses with you
- entering a daily alarm in your mobile phone to remind you.
Take any blood pressure medicine exactly as prescribed. Don’t stop or change your medicine, unless your doctor advises you to.

**Blood pressure and potassium**

Dietary potassium lessens the effect of dietary sodium. This means that eating foods high in potassium can help most people manage their blood pressure. This can generally be achieved by eating vegetables, fruits and wholegrains.

However, this recommendation may not apply to some people, such as people whose kidneys don’t function normally or who are taking certain medicines. Ask your doctor for more information.

Increasing your dietary potassium is not enough on its own, but in combination with other efforts such as exercising regularly, reducing your sodium intake and developing other healthy eating behaviours, it can help you to manage your blood pressure.

**Where to get help**

- Your GP (doctor)
- Your local community health centre
- Heart Foundation Helpline Tel. 13 11 12
- Quitline Tel. 13 7848 – for information on quitting smoking
- Medicines Line (Australia) Tel. 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424) – for information on prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines

**References**

- *Low blood pressure (hypotension)*, 2018, Mayo Clinic.
- *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*, 2009, National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government.

**Send us your feedback**

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

1/4 How would you rate this website?

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Fair
- Poor

Next Submit Now Cancel

2/4 Your Comments

Tell us who you are Select an option

Enter your comments below (optional)

Next Submit Now Cancel

2/4 Your Comments

Tell us who you are Select an option  

Enter your comments below (optional)

Next Submit Now Cancel

**Send us your feedback**

- Rate this website
- Your comments
Blood and blood vessels explained

Blood count

The full blood count (FBC) test looks for abnormalities in the blood, such as unusually high or low numbers of blood cells.

Blood groups

A person's blood group is determined by a pair of genes, one each inherited from their mother and father.

Bone marrow

Bone marrow is the spongy tissue in the hollow centres of a person's long bones and is the blood cell 'factory'.

Circulatory system

The heart, blood and blood vessels work together to service the cells of the body.

Heart explained

The heart is about the size of a clenched fist and lies in the middle of your chest, behind and slightly to the left of your breastbone.

Lipoedema

Lipoedema is a painful, chronic, symmetrical swelling in the legs, thighs, buttocks and sometimes arms due to the accumulation of fat in the subcutaneous tissues.

The onset often occurs during puberty.

Lymphatic system

The lymphatic system manages fluid levels in the body, filters out bacteria and houses types of white blood cells.
Cholesterol

- **Cholesterol**
  Your body needs cholesterol, but it can make its own. You don't need cholesterol in your diet.

- **Cholesterol - healthy eating tips**
  Replacing foods that contain saturated fats with foods that contain polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats will help to lower your cholesterol.

- **Genetic factors and cholesterol**
  Familial hypercholesterolaemia is an inherited condition characterised by higher than normal levels of blood cholesterol.

- **Triglycerides**
  If a person habitually eats more kилоjoules than they burn, they will have raised triglyceride levels in the blood.

Iron anaemia and blood disorders

- **Anaemia**
  When a person is anaemic, the red blood cells have to work harder to get oxygen around the body.

- **Haemochromatosis**
  Haemochromatosis (iron overload disorder) tends to be under-diagnosed, partly because its symptoms are similar to those caused by a range of other illnesses.

- **Hughes syndrome**
  Hughes syndrome is thickening of the blood caused by abnormal immune system cells.

- **Iron**
  Iron is important for transporting oxygen in the blood.

- **Iron deficiency - adults**
  Don't take iron supplements unless advised by your doctor.

- **Iron deficiency - children**
  Keep iron supplements away from children - as little as one to three grams can kill a child under six years.

- **Porphyria**
  Porphyria can affect the skin, nervous system, gastrointestinal system or all of these, depending on the specific type.

- **Thalassaemia**
  Thalassaemia is an inherited blood disorder that can cause anaemia or death if not treated.

Bleeding clotting and infections

- **Bleeding**
  Bleeding may be minor or it may be a life-threatening medical emergency.

- **Deep vein thrombosis**
  Long international flights are suspected of contributing to deep vein thrombosis in susceptible people.

- **Haemophilia**
  All children with severe haemophilia are given preventative treatment with infusions of blood products before they have a bleed.

- **Needlestick injury**
  A needlestick injury means the skin is accidentally punctured by a used needle. Diseases that could be transmitted by a needle or needlestick injury include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

- **Nosebleeds**
  Bleeding from the nose is common in children and is usually not severe or serious.

- **Septicaemia**
  Bacteria in the bowels, urinary tract, mouth and skin can cause disease if they get into the bloodstream.

- **Subarachnoid haemorrhage**

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
A subarachnoid haemorrhage is any bleed located underneath one of the protective layers of the brain known as the arachnoid layer.

- **Subdural haematoma**
  Subdural haematomas are blood clots formed underneath one of the protective layers of the brain.

- **Travel tips for seniors**
  All travellers should plan carefully, but older people have a few extra concerns when travelling.

- **Von Willebrand disease**
  A person with von Willebrand disease may have frequent nosebleeds, heavy menstruation or excessive bleeding from the mouth.

**Blood pressure**

- **Blood pressure**
  Healthy eating and lifestyle changes can help to manage high blood pressure.

- **Blood pressure (high) - hypertension**
  Hypertension, or high blood pressure, can increase your risk of heart attack, kidney failure and stroke.

- **Blood pressure - keep your blood pressure down (video)**
  Heart Foundation of Australia warns of the risk of high blood pressure and tells you what you can do to keep your blood pressure down.

- **Blood pressure (low) - hypotension**
  Low blood pressure is only a problem if it has a negative impact on the body.

- **Dizziness - orthostatic hypotension**
  Postural hypotension is the lightheaded feeling you may get if you leap out of bed very quickly.

- **Fainting**
  Common causes of fainting include heat, pain, distress, the sight of blood, anxiety and hyperventilating.

- **Pulmonary hypertension**
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.

- **Stroke explained**
  A stroke interrupts blood flow to an area of the brain and is a medical emergency.

**Blood vessel and bone marrow conditions**

- **Amyloidosis**
  A person with amyloidosis produces aggregates of insoluble protein that cannot be eliminated from the body.

- **Aneurysm**
  An aneurysm may have no symptoms until it is either very large or it ruptures.

- **Granulomatosis with polyangiitis**
  Granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA), formerly known as Wegener granulomatosis is a rare condition that targets the arteries, veins and capillaries of the kidneys and the respiratory system.

- **Henoch-Schonlein purpura**
  Henoch-Schonlein purpura causes a purple spotted skin rash which lasts around one to four weeks, and is often marked by relapses.

- **Leukaemia**
  Most children and many adults with acute leukaemia can expect to be cured, while chronic leukaemia can be successfully managed.

- **Peripheral vascular disease**
  Peripheral vascular disease is the reduced circulation of blood to a body part (other than the brain or heart).

- **Polycythaemia vera**
  Polycythaemia vera is characterised by the production of too many red blood cells, caused by abnormal function of the bone marrow.

- **Raynaud's phenomenon**
  Raynaud's phenomenon can be a sign of a more serious underlying condition, so see your doctor if you experience it.
• Thalassaemia
  Thalassaemia is an inherited blood disorder that can cause anaemia or death if not treated.
• Varicose veins and spider veins
  Smaller varicose veins are usually treated by sclerotherapy - the injection of irritant chemicals into the affected vein.

Blood-donation-and-transfusion

• Blood donation
  Donated blood is used to help people who are sick or injured, or for medical research.
• Blood transfusion
  Donated blood is screened for blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis, syphilis and HIV.
• Organ and tissue donation
  Discover the facts about organ and tissue donation, decide about becoming a donor and discuss your decision with the people close to you.

Related Information

• Body mass index calculator for children and teenagers
  This calculator measures body mass index (BMI), which is a measure of body fat. It is only an approximate measure of the best weight for your health. The calculator can be used for anyone from two to...
• Blood and blood vessels
  Bleeding, blood pressure, conditions, risks and blood products.
• Dizziness - orthostatic hypotension
  Postural hypotension is the lightheaded feeling you may get if you leap out of bed very quickly.
• Blood pressure (low) - hypotension
  Low blood pressure is only a problem if it has a negative impact on the body.
• Blood groups
  A person's blood group is determined by a pair of genes, one each inherited from their mother and father.

Home

Related information on other websites

• Heart Foundation – Cardiovascular conditions: high blood pressure.

Content Partner

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by: Heart Foundation

Last updated: July 2018

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.
My Health Life helps you manage your health

With tools, information and recommendations tailored to you, it’s your personal and secure health dashboard.

Medical Dictionary

Enter a search term
Enter keyword(s)
Search

Search for your topic using the Merriam Webster medical dictionary

Service Search

Find services near you

Service: Select a service
Location:

Type a minimum of three characters then press UP or DOWN on the keyboard to navigate the autocompleted search results

Find a service

Find a doctor

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Need to find a doctor in your local area? Take a look at the general practitioners entry in our health service profiles.

Recent Activity

54 people have watched a video today
Polls polled today are 3.

- **Health topics**
  - Conditions and treatments
  - Healthy living
  - Services and support
  
- **Explore**
  - Recipes
  - Healthy pantry
  - Videos
  - Consumer medicine information
  - Multilingual health information - Health Translations Directory
  
- **About**
  - About us
  - Accessibility
  - Content partners
  - Privacy
  - Terms of use
  - Contact us
  
- **Connect with us**
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - YouTube

Page last reviewed: 30 Apr 2013


  - Privacy Statement
  - Copyright Notice
  - Disclaimer Notice

This web site is managed and authorised by the Department of Health & Human Services, State Government of Victoria, Australia

© Copyright State of Victoria 2018.

Back to Top