

Ways to lower your blood pressure

Most people can lower their blood pressure by a combination of good diet, exercise and if necessary medication. You can lower your blood pressure if you:

- reduce your salt intake (salt increases blood pressure) – don't add salt to food, reduce takeaways that contain high amounts of salt, and read labels and choose low salt options when possible
- eat a diet that is low in saturated fat and high in fruit, vegetables, cereals and wholemeal bread. Reduce your intake of coffee and licorice
- don't smoke
- limit your alcohol intake. A moderate amount of alcohol (1 glass per day for women and 2 glasses per day for men) can lower your risk of stroke but more alcohol than that may be harmful to your health
- become physically active. Try to build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

Keeping a healthy blood pressure

Get your blood pressure checked regularly even if you feel well.

If you are worried about any aspect of your blood pressure discuss it with your doctor.

If you do have high blood pressure your doctor may advise a combination of diet, exercise and medications to reduce it.



Remember

- **Know** what your blood pressure should be
- Have your blood pressure **checked** regularly
- The **lower your blood pressure** the lower your risk of stroke.



For further information and resources go to our website www.stroke.org.nz



DOWN
With Blood
Pressure!

Lower blood pressure
= lower risk of stroke

ABOUT BLOOD PRESSURE

www.stroke.org.nz

What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is a measurement of the force your blood puts on blood vessel walls as it travels through the body.

Blood pressure is written as two numbers, for example

120/80

First number

Systolic blood pressure

The force your blood puts on blood vessel walls as your heart beats

Second number

Diastolic blood pressure

The force your blood puts on blood vessel walls when your heart is at rest between beats

Blood pressure varies and if the reading is high, your doctor may measure your blood pressure on a number of occasions. You may be asked to monitor your blood pressure at home – *your doctor will discuss this with you.*

Normal and high blood pressure

Normal blood pressure is around 120/80 although lower is better. High normal blood pressure is between 120/80 and 140/90. If your blood pressure is **consistently** over 140/90 you have high blood pressure and should see your doctor.



Lower is better

The levels for normal and high blood pressure are a guide only. In general, **the lower your blood pressure, the lower your risk of stroke.**

What is stroke?

Stroke is a sudden interruption of blood flow to a part of the brain. It can occur when a blood vessel gets blocked (ischaemic stroke), or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts (haemorrhagic stroke).

What is the relationship between high blood pressure and stroke?

High blood pressure is a key risk factor for stroke. High blood pressure puts pressure on the blood vessel walls that can cause them to thicken and break down. The pressure can cause a blood clot or fatty tissue to break off the walls and block a brain artery causing an ischaemic stroke.

High blood pressure can also weaken the walls of blood vessels in the brain. The blood vessel may burst at the weakened area, leaking blood into the brain causing a haemorrhagic stroke.

High blood pressure may also speed up some types of heart disease that can lead to stroke. In a few cases high blood pressure can cause a stroke in people born with faulty blood vessels.

Untreated high blood pressure will increase the risk of stroke, heart attack and kidney failure. High blood pressure is often known as the silent killer because sufferers can have high blood pressure yet have no symptoms.

What causes high blood pressure?

In most cases it is impossible to pinpoint an exact cause. However, there are a number of risk factors that have been linked to high blood pressure. These include:

- age (the occurrence of high blood pressure rises as people get older)
- gender (men are more likely to have high blood pressure than women)
- a family history of high blood pressure, stroke or heart attack
- being overweight
- smoking
- excess salt in the diet
- lack of physical activity
- excessive alcohol intake
- diabetes

If you check your blood pressure at home you can probably learn what causes it to rise.

