# Salt and Blood Pressure

## What is blood pressure?

As your heart pumps blood around your body, your blood puts pressure on your blood vessel walls.

GPs can do simple tests to check your blood pressure. Blood pressure readings consist of two numbers. The first is your systolic blood pressure and represents the highest pressure reached when your heart pumps. The second is diastolic pressure which refers to the lowest blood pressure reached when your heart relaxes. **A normal blood pressure reading is under 120/80mmHg.**

## When is blood pressure too high?

High blood pressure (also known as hypertension) is when there is too much pressure on the blood vessels which can cause strain and lead to damage which will increase your risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) which includes heart attacks and strokes. The risk of getting high blood pressure significantly increases if you have a high salt diet.

The risk of CVD starts at a systolic blood pressure of around **115mmHg** and a high blood pressure is defined as a blood pressure which consistently exceeds **140/90 mmHg**.

## What causes blood pressure to rise?

Although a number of factors such as obesity and smoking can increase your blood pressure, the biggest cause of high blood pressure is a high salt diet. Salt is responsible for many thousands of strokes, heart attacks and heart failure deaths each year through its effect of slowly putting up our blood pressure.  Other lifestyle factors which can cause blood pressure to rise include:

- Poor diet
- Lack of exercise
- Being overweight
- Family History
- Excess Alcohol
- Smoking

## How common is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the biggest cause of death in the world through the strokes and heart attacks that it causes.  Approximately one in three adults in the UK (16million) has high blood pressure, and many more have raised blood pressure and are at risk. Five million people don't even know they have the condition. Many of these cases could have been prevented simply by eating less salt.

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## Who is at risk of high blood pressure?

Anyone can get high blood pressure, particularly if they have a family history of it. Blood pressure also increases with age so as you get older it is important to take greater care with your diet and lifestyle to try and prevent getting high blood pressure.

## Preventing or reducing high blood pressure

The good news is that with simple lifestyle changes such as improving diet, increasing exercise and reducing your alcohol consumption you can help prevent getting high blood pressure.

Diet is one of the easiest risk factors that you can change to help reduce your risk of high blood pressure. Keeping your salt intake low from a young age will help to prevent the rise in blood pressure that occurs as you get older.

Reducing your intake of high salt foods, particularly processed foods which contain a lot of hidden salt, can really help you to reduce your risk of high blood pressure. Currently the average salt intake in the UK is 8.1g per day; much higher than the daily recommended maximum limit of 6g!

Eating more fruit and vegetables will increase your intake of potassium – this is a mineral which helps to counteract the effect that salt has on increasing water retention and blood pressure.

### Top tips

- You will often see sodium on labels; this is only a part of salt. You will need to **multiply the amount of sodium by 2.5 to get the salt level**.
- Did you know that most (75%) of the salt you eat is hidden in processed foods? **Check labels** of products such as bread, cereal, soup, sauces and meat products and choose lower salt options
- **Don't add salt** when cooking or at the table; it will only take a couple of weeks for you to adjust to the taste
- Have regular blood pressure checks to monitor your progress

**For further information contact CASH**
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