

Love your heart

A South Asian guide to controlling
your blood pressure



**Blood Pressure
Association**
the blood pressure charity

Love your heart

If you are of South Asian origin, then this booklet is for you. It has been written to help you to keep your heart and body healthy by controlling your blood pressure.

High blood pressure is the biggest known cause of heart disease and stroke in the UK. Heart disease and stroke can cause serious illness, disability, and even death.

South Asian people in the UK are at a much higher risk of dying from heart disease or a stroke. Controlling your blood pressure can really help to lower your risk of serious health problems.

This booklet explains what blood pressure is, and how it affects your heart and body. It shows how controlling your blood pressure can help you avoid strokes and heart disease, as well as other health conditions.

High blood pressure is the biggest known cause of disability and premature death through stroke, heart attack and heart disease. One in three adults in the UK has high blood pressure and every day 350 people have a preventable stroke or heart attack caused by the condition.

WHAT THE BLOOD PRESSURE NUMBERS MEAN

Your reading	What this means	What to do
120/80 or lower	Your blood pressure level is ideal	Follow the advice in this booklet to keep it this way
Between 121/81 – 139/89	Your blood pressure is higher than it should be	Follow the advice in this booklet to lower it
140/90 or higher	You may have high blood pressure	See your GP or practice nurse for further advice.

What is blood pressure?

When your heart beats, it pumps blood round your body to give it the energy and oxygen it needs. As blood moves it pushes against the sides of your blood vessels. The strength of this pushing is your blood pressure.

Blood pressure is not usually something that you feel. The only way to know what your blood pressure is, is to have it measured.

When your blood pressure is measured it will be written as two numbers, e.g. 120/80 mmHg or '120 over 80'. Next time you have yours measured, ask what your numbers are.

Why does high blood pressure matter?

If your reading is 140 over 90 or higher, over a number of week then you probably have high blood pressure. Even if just one of the numbers is high, you may have high blood pressure.

High blood pressure won't make you feel unwell, but it can be very dangerous to your health. If you do not lower it, it can damage your heart, blood vessels and other organs. This can put you at risk of serious health problems.

If you have diabetes, high blood pressure can damage your heart and blood vessels even more. For this reason, you may need to keep your blood pressure below 130 over 80.

How high blood pressure affects your body

Your heart

High blood pressure is a major cause of heart attacks. A heart attack happens when a blood vessel supplying blood to your heart becomes blocked or bursts. When this happens, parts of the heart become damaged or die.

High blood pressure can also cause heart failure or an enlarged heart, both of which will mean that your heart is not working as well as it should.

Your brain

High blood pressure is a major cause of strokes. A stroke happens when a blood vessel supplying blood to your brain becomes blocked or bursts. When this happens, parts of the brain become damaged or die.

High blood pressure also causes some forms of dementia. This means problems like memory loss, confusion, and difficulties with speaking and understanding.

Your kidneys

High blood pressure can cause kidney disease by damaging the blood vessels that supply your kidneys. If your kidneys are not working as well as they should, this can seriously affect your health.

If your kidneys are damaged, they will often try to raise your blood pressure even higher. This puts even more strain on your heart and blood vessels and on the kidneys themselves.

Your legs

High blood pressure can cause the blood vessels in your legs to narrow, making it difficult for blood to flow through them. This can cause painful cramps, for example when you are walking.

High blood pressure can also cause swelling in your ankles. This can be uncomfortable and may sometimes lead to varicose veins or leg ulcers.

High blood pressure can damage other organs, including your eyes. It may also cause erection problems in men. For these reasons it is very important to keep your blood pressure levels down.



Controlling your blood pressure helps to keep your body in good condition. The next pages show how you can keep your blood pressure lowered by eating well and keeping active. By taking a few simple steps you can keep your heart and body healthier for longer.



Try adding fresh vegetables and pulses in stews and curries



Healthy eating and blood pressure

Salt

Eating too much salt raises your blood pressure. Adults should eat less than 6 grams of salt a day, but most of us eat much more. You should try to add less salt when cooking or at the table, but also look closely at how much salt is already in the foods you buy.

Around 80% of the salt we eat is hidden in foods like bread, breakfast cereals or biscuits. Spice mixes, sauces and pickles also often contain a lot of salt. When you are shopping, always read the label and choose those with the least salt.

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables contain potassium, which helps to keep your blood pressure down. Adults should eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. A portion is 80 grams, roughly the size of a fist.

Try adding more vegetables and pulses to stews or curries, or replace sweet snacks with fresh or dried fruit. Try to vary what fruit and vegetables you eat. Fresh, dried, frozen and tinned are all fine, but watch out for added salt, sugar or fats.



Try to use less oil
when cooking and
check your alcohol
intake



Alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol raises your blood pressure over time. If you keep to the recommended limits for alcohol, this will help to keep your blood pressure down.

The recommended limits are 21 units of alcohol a week for men, and 14 units a week for women. A unit is roughly half a pint of normal-strength beer or cider, a small glass of wine, or a single pub measure of spirits.

Fats

Eating too much fatty food will cause you to gain weight, which raises your blood pressure. Fatty foods also raise your cholesterol levels, raising your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Fats like butter, ghee and palm oil are particularly bad. Try to limit the number of meals with these ingredients, and don't add butter or ghee to bread, chappatis or rice.

Olive oil, sunflower oil or rapeseed oil are better for you, but they are still fats. When you are cooking, measure the oil that you use, and try to use less.

Healthy lifestyle and blood pressure

Activity

Keeping active really helps to lower your blood pressure and keep your heart healthy. Adults should try to get 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week. Anything that leaves you feeling warm and slightly out of breath is ideal.

Think about ways to be more active in your daily life. You could take a brisk walk, do some active gardening, or take the children to the park. You must find something that you enjoy doing, so that you will keep doing it.

If you can't find 30 minutes in your day, increasing your activity by even a small amount can help. Three 10-minute sessions can be just as helpful. You could also try to get family and friends involved, since everyone can benefit from being more active.

Weight

Losing weight if you need to will help to lower your blood pressure. It will also keep your heart and body healthy and help you avoid health problems.

To lose weight, you need to increase the amount of calories your body needs by being more active. You also need to reduce the amount of calories you take in by eating less fatty and sugary foods.

Losing weight should not just be about "going on a diet". It should be about making small changes to your lifestyle that you can keep to.

Smoking

Smoking is a major cause of heart disease and stroke. Smokers are almost twice as likely to have a heart attack as someone who has never smoked. Chewing tobacco or taking snuff are equally dangerous.

It can be difficult to give up, but there are now a number of different services available to help you stop. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice.



Medicines for high blood pressure

Changing your diet and being more active can really help you control your blood pressure, but they may not lower it enough on their own. You may need to take medicines to lower it further.

There is a wide range of medicines available for high blood pressure. Your doctor or nurse will work with you to find the right medicines for you. Every person is different, and some types of medicine work better in different types of people. What works well for a friend or relative may not work so well for you.

Many people find that one medicine alone will not lower their blood pressure enough. Each type of medicine works on different systems in the body, so taking more than one should have more of an effect on your blood pressure.

Getting the most from your medicines

High blood pressure cannot be cured, and if you need to take medicines, you will probably need to keep taking them for life. If you stop, your blood pressure will rise back up again.

Build your medicines into your daily routine – take them at the same time every day, and get into the habit of taking them. This will help you get the most benefit from them.

It is still important to keep up with a healthy lifestyle even if you are taking medicines for high blood pressure. The more you can lower your blood pressure without medicines, the less medicine you will need. A healthy lifestyle can also help your medicines to work better for you.



Healthy pressure, healthy heart

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke, but it is not the only one. Since people of South Asian origin are at a higher risk of these problems, it is important to control as many risk factors as you can.

The good news is that by following a healthy lifestyle to lower your blood pressure, you will also be helping to control other risk factors. So it makes even more sense to control your blood pressure, as it helps your heart and body in more ways than one.

Diabetes

People of South Asian origin are around 6 times more likely to develop diabetes than other people. Diabetes increases your risk of heart disease and stroke, and can also cause serious damage to your kidneys.

If you have high blood pressure and diabetes, your risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease is even higher. So it is even more important to keep your blood pressure lowered.

A healthy lifestyle to lower your blood pressure will also help lower your risk of diabetes. Even if you already have diabetes, a healthy lifestyle will help limit the damage it does to your body.

Cholesterol

High levels of cholesterol in your blood can raise your risk of a heart attack or stroke. This is because the cholesterol builds up in your blood vessels, and may block them. Your cholesterol levels will be higher if you eat a lot of fatty foods, or if you aren't active enough.

If you have high blood pressure and high cholesterol, your risk of heart attack and stroke is even higher. But again, eating well and keeping active can lower both your blood pressure and your cholesterol. Your doctor can also give you medicines to lower your cholesterol, if you need them.

Take action now

High blood pressure raises your risk of future health problems, but this does not mean you can wait until later to take action. Your blood pressure is very important, whatever your age.

Making the changes in this booklet now will keep your heart and blood vessels healthier for longer. It will keep you in good habits that will help you live to a healthy old age.

But it is never too late to take action to lower your blood pressure. High blood pressure is not simply a part of growing old. You can take steps to lower it no matter how old you are.

Even small changes can make a big difference, so why not make a start today?

More information about high blood pressure

If you have high blood pressure, our information and support services can help you to control it. These include:

- A telephone information line (0845 241 0989, 11am -3pm Mon-Fri)
- A range of useful booklets and information sheets to help you understand more about your blood pressure.
- A website packed with information and an email enquiry service if you have any questions
- Online discussion forums to share your experiences and learn from other people with high blood pressure.

The Blood Pressure Association is a registered charity and we rely on donations to help us carry out our work. Why not become a full member to help support us? Our members receive a quarterly magazine and access to a range of products and services. Membership costs £20 a year (£10 a year discounted rate).

**For more information, call us on 020 8772 4994
or visit our website www.bpassoc.org.uk**

About this booklet

High blood pressure is a major cause of heart disease and stroke. People of South Asian descent are much more likely to develop these health problems than other people. This booklet has been written to help you understand more about your blood pressure. It talks about:

- What high blood pressure actually means
- How high blood pressure affects your body
- How to lower blood pressure through a healthier lifestyle

This booklet has been written with help from people who have high blood pressure, and from professionals who are experts in the field. It has been designed to give you the information you need to make the right choices for you.

This booklet is also available to download in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. For more information, visit our website at www.bpassoc.org.uk



**Blood Pressure
Association**
the blood pressure charity

The Blood Pressure Association is the UK charity working to lower the nation's blood pressure to prevent disability and premature death from stroke, heart attack and heart disease. We do this through raising awareness about the importance of high blood pressure amongst the general public, people at risk and health professionals. We help and support people living with the condition and those at risk of developing it. Through our campaigning, we give people with high blood pressure a voice to ensure that they get the best care possible.

With thanks to the South Asian Health Foundation for their help in producing this booklet.
Produced with support from the Department of Health January 2009

For more about how we make our information, go to www.bpassoc.org.uk/AboutUs

Registered Charity No. 1058944 Company Limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales
Company No. 03251531 Registered Office at : 60 Cranmer Terrace, London. SW17 0QS

Design: Chapman Design Limited Photos: John Birdsall/iStock