



strokefoundation

Stop stroke. Save lives. End suffering.

Know your numbers

Things you should know about your blood pressure



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National Stroke Foundation

Welcome

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This blood pressure reading and accompanying information is provided for information purposes only. It is not:

- a substitute for professional medical advice; or
- a comprehensive statement of the nature and consequences of high blood pressure.

Blood pressure can vary from day to day and if you believe you are suffering from high blood pressure or have any other concerns about your health you are advised to seek professional medical advice. You should not disregard professional medical advice or delay seeking it because of this blood pressure reading and accompanying information.

INFORMATION FOR DOCTORS

Know your numbers is an initiative of the National Stroke Foundation. The program aims to increase awareness about blood pressure in the community; convey a message about the importance of having regular blood pressure checks and to increase an understanding of the consequences of high blood pressure. In all individuals, blood pressure is measured at a community pressure station using a digital blood pressure monitoring device. All participants are seated during the procedure and recommended for measurement to be taken in the dominant arm.

For further information about Know your numbers please contact the National Stroke Foundation.

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Stroke is Australia's second single greatest killer and a leading cause of disability among adults. Close to 60,000 strokes occur in Australia every year – that's one stroke every 10 minutes.

Fortunately, there are a number of risk factors that you can control to reduce your chances of having a stroke. This booklet is for individuals who have attended one of the National Stroke Foundation's Blood Pressure Stations or who simply wish to know more about blood pressure. It is designed to provide you with an overview of blood pressure, how it relates to stroke, and what lifestyle changes and drug therapies you can adopt to help reduce the risk of stroke.

What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when blood going to the brain is interrupted. Blood is carried to the brain by blood vessels called arteries. Blood may stop moving through an artery because the artery is blocked or because the artery breaks or bursts.

When blood flow is stopped, the brain cannot get the oxygen it needs, brain cells in the area die and the brain can become permanently damaged.

What are the risk factors for stroke?

Stroke risk is influenced by many factors. Some factors, such as age, gender and a family history of stroke, cannot be controlled.

However, there are a number of other risk factors that you can control to help reduce your chances of having a stroke. These include:

- ☼ High blood pressure.
- ☼ High cholesterol.
- ☼ Being overweight.
- ☼ Excessive alcohol.
- ☼ Smoking.
- ☼ Poor diet and inactivity.
- ☼ Diabetes.
- ☼ Atrial fibrillation.

The more risk factors you have, the higher your chances of having a stroke.

Individuals with the highest risk of stroke include those with multiple risk factors and those who have already suffered a transient ischaemic attack (TIA), stroke or heart attack.

What is blood pressure?

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

High blood pressure is one of the most important risk factors for stroke.

What do your blood pressure numbers mean?

Your blood pressure reading is expressed with two numbers; for example, 120/80.

120

80

This is the systolic pressure. It is the force your blood puts on the blood vessel walls as your heart pumps.

This is the diastolic pressure. It is the force your blood puts on blood vessel walls when your heart is resting between beats.

Blood pressure does not stay the same all of the time. The levels for normal and high blood pressure are a guide only.

Normal



Normal blood pressure is around 120/80 or lower.

High-normal blood pressure is between 120/80 and 140/90.

High



High blood pressure is when your blood pressure is consistently over 140/90. This is known as 'hypertension'.

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. There are a number of different blood pressure devices you may use to do this. Talk to your doctor about what is best for you.

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:

- ✱ A family history of high blood pressure.
- ✱ Age (blood pressure can rise as people get older).
- ✱ Men are more likely to have high blood pressure than women.
- ✱ Being overweight.
- ✱ Excessive alcohol drinking.
- ✱ Smoking.
- ✱ Diabetes.
- ✱ Lack of exercise.
- ✱ A diet high in salt.

In general, the lower your blood pressure, the lower your risk of stroke. Your doctor can talk to you about your blood pressure and risk of stroke and recommend treatment if required.

Why does blood pressure matter?

High blood pressure can have many harmful effects which can eventually lead to a stroke. For example:

- ✱ High blood pressure puts extra stress on blood vessel walls. This can cause the blood vessel to weaken or breakdown, eventually leading to a stroke.
- ✱ High blood pressure can speed up common forms of heart disease that can lead to stroke.
- ✱ High blood pressure can cause blood clots or plaque (cholesterol and other fat-like substances) to break off artery walls and block a brain artery causing a stroke.

“Doctors sometimes call high blood pressure the ‘silent killer’ because sufferers can have high blood pressure and show no warning signs. If untreated, high blood pressure will increase the risk of stroke, heart attack and kidney failure.”

Changing your lifestyle to lower blood pressure and your risk of stroke

Tips to help get you started!

You don't have to rely on medication alone to control your blood pressure. There are a number of lifestyle changes you can make to help lower your blood pressure and your risk of stroke. Some people with mild hypertension are able to control their blood pressure simply by adopting a healthy lifestyle. Lifestyle changes not only lower blood pressure, they can also increase the effectiveness of blood pressure medication and reduce the risk of stroke, heart attack and diabetes. It is important to:

① Know your numbers and keep your blood pressure down

Remember, the lower your blood pressure, the lower your risk of stroke. The only way to know your blood pressure is to have it checked regularly and it is important that your doctor confirms your blood pressure measurement.

② Shape up

- ✱ Keep your weight within a healthy range for your age and gender.
- ✱ Being overweight can increase your blood pressure. It may also raise your cholesterol and increase the risk of developing diabetes.
- ✱ Set small realistic goals for weight loss. There are no ‘quick fixes’. A sensible weight plan includes eating healthy foods and exercising regularly.
- ✱ Seek advice from your GP and/or Dietitian.



③ Eat foods that are good for you

- ✱ Include more wholemeal bread, wholegrain cereals and eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables in your diet.
- ✱ Try to lower the amount of total and saturated fat in your diet. Choose lean meats, low-fat or reduced-fat foods and avoid adding additional fats to your diet such as butter.
- ✱ Eat fewer fried foods. Breadcrumbs and frying foods like fish, chicken and vegetables adds fat and calories.
- ✱ Try eating more fish (canned or fresh). Try consuming fish at least twice a week.
- ✱ Drink six to eight glasses of water each day.
- ✱ Don't skip breakfast – it is particularly important as it kick-starts your metabolism.

Finding it hard to change your eating habits? Try one improvement in your diet each week.

Drop the salt!

We now know that salt in the diet increases blood pressure. This is true for almost all Australians and everyone should look for ways to reduce the amount of salt in their diet:

- ✱ Don't add salt at the table or when cooking.
- ✱ Read the labels on foods and choose 'low salt' or 'no added salt' foods. A low salt food has less than 120mg sodium per 100g (sodium is another word for salt). If you can't find one below this level choose the lowest you can find or switch to a different product.
- ✱ Cut down on takeaway and restaurant foods which contain a lot of salt.
- ✱ Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and only buy low-salt pre-prepared foods.

④ Get active

Try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise* on most days of the week. Start changing your habits to be active every day in as many ways as you can:

- ✱ Leave the car at home for short trips and walk or ride a bike instead.
- ✱ Get off the bus or train stop early.
- ✱ Take the stairs instead of the lift.
- ✱ Wash the car yourself or get out in the garden.
- ✱ Play with the kids after school.
- ✱ Take up activities such as golf, tennis or cycling.
- ✱ Start a walking group with your friends.

Finding it hard to keep exercising? Choose an exercise you enjoy or try walking with a family member or friend.

* Note: some types of exercises should be avoided by people with high blood pressure – please ask your doctor about what is best for you.

⑤ Cut down or QUIT

- ✱ Quit smoking.
- ✱ Stay within recommended limits for drinking alcohol. These are two standard drinks per day if you're male and one standard drink per day if you're female.
 - The definitions of standard drinks are as follows:
 - ✓ Low alcohol beer: 375ml (e.g., one 'stubby' bottle).
 - ✓ Regular beer: 285ml.
 - ✓ Table wine: 100ml.
 - ✓ Spirits: 30ml.

Please note: these are general guidelines only. Don't be discouraged if your blood pressure doesn't drop straight away - it may take some time for lifestyle changes and/or medications to have an effect.

Blood pressure medications

If you have high blood pressure, or your overall risk of stroke is high because you have multiple stroke risk factors, your doctor may prescribe medications to lower your blood pressure. There are many blood pressure medications and your doctor may need to increase the dose or use these medications in combination to reduce your blood pressure.

Some people will require a number of different ways to lower their blood pressure (medication and lifestyle changes).

If you have already had a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA), the use of blood pressure lowering drugs have been shown to reduce the chance of a further stroke. The benefits of lowering blood pressure occur irrespective of your current blood pressure.

It is important to take your blood pressure medication as prescribed. Do not make decisions about stopping your medication without talking to your doctor.

Where to go for more information

There are a number of places that you can go to for more information...

National Stroke Foundation

StrokeLine: 1800 787 653

www.strokefoundation.com.au

Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health

www.awash.org.au

Better Health Channel

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Quit

Quitline: 13 7848

www.quit.org.au

How do you measure up?

Australian Better Health Initiative

www.measureup.gov.au

Go for your life

'Go for your life' Infoline: 1300 73 98 99

www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au

**For more information call StrokeLine 1800 787 653 or visit
www.strokefoundation.com.au**