

# Don't Lose Heart!

Advice & Information about  
taking care of your  
**Blood Pressure**



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# Let's have a heart-to-heart about: **Blood Pressure**

Everyone is at some risk of developing heart-related illnesses. The good news is that the risk can often be reduced – even if you have a history of them in your family. High Blood Pressure is a key driver in developing heart disease and stroke.

The first step in heart disease prevention: **know what your Blood Pressure Level is!**

Did you know?  
**1 Million\* people in Ireland have high blood pressure!**

Heart-related illnesses are the 2nd biggest cause of death in Ireland, second only to cancer

\*Source: Irish Heart Foundation



How  
much  
pressure  
are you  
putting  
on your  
heart?

The ideal  
level of blood  
pressure is  
120/80.

If it is 140/90\* or  
higher, you need  
to visit your GP

\*Diabetic patients should see their  
GP if levels are 140/80 or higher

## What does blood pressure actually mean?


We all have blood pressure – it is the amount of work our hearts have to do to pump blood around the arteries – and it can vary throughout the day.

The only way to know if your  
blood pressure is too high  
is to have it measured!

Your blood pressure is measured by two numbers: the first is called *Systolic*, which is the pressure on your heart when it's at its highest, as it contracts and squeezes blood out to the arteries. The second number is called *Diastolic*, which is the amount of pressure on the heart when it relaxes to let blood flow back in. The reading that you get when your blood pressure is measured is expressed as the systolic number over the diastolic, e.g. 136/85

# What does having high blood pressure mean?

When your blood pressure is higher than normal for a sustained period, we call it high blood pressure – or hypertension. Someone who has high blood pressure may look & feel well, often showing no symptoms. However, if untreated, hypertension can increase the risk of stroke, heart attack & heart disease. It can also cause damage to other organs in the body, like your kidneys and your eyes.



About 4/5 men and 2/3 women in Ireland have high blood pressure and are not being treated\*

\*Source: Irish Heart Foundation

## Am I at risk?

We are all at some risk of high blood pressure. As we grow older, our blood pressure naturally increases. Healthy people over 30 should have their blood pressure measured every 2-3 years, more if they have higher results or a family history of heart problems. Being overweight, drinking too much alcohol, smoking, not doing enough exercise, and eating too much salt can all increase our blood pressure. Some ethnic groups are more prone to higher levels than others so should be checked more regularly. About 1 in 10 people with high blood pressure have an underlying condition causing it – these cases are referred to as secondary high blood pressure.

### Low Blood Pressure

If your blood pressure measures under 90/60, it's considered low. This is fine if no symptoms are caused, but if you feel faint, dizzy, nauseated or have blurred vision, visit your GP.



## The first step in taking control is Diagnosis

Your local totalhealth Pharmacy can help you find out if your blood pressure is measuring too high but only your GP can diagnose you with hypertension. One high reading doesn't necessarily mean you have high blood pressure. You will most likely require a series of readings at different times, or 24-hour blood pressure monitoring. If your doctor deems it necessary, you may be prescribed medication to manage your blood pressure, in conjunction with lifestyle changes.

Only 1 in 3\*  
people with  
High Blood Pressure  
have their condition  
under control

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\*Source: Irish Heart Foundation

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# Blood Pressure Medication



Blood pressure medication can interact with non-prescription medicines such as cold & flu remedies. If you are taking any medication, always check with the pharmacy before using over-the-counter remedies.

Your doctor may prescribe medicine to lower your blood pressure – there are many options available and some people might need to take more than one type. Make the most of your medicine by taking it exactly as prescribed.

## Side-Effects

In general, blood pressure medicines have few side-effects. If you find that a medicine doesn't suit you, tell your pharmacist or doctor instead of suffering in silence – there may be another option available to you. Never stop taking a medicine without speaking to your GP.

## Is it working?

It's important to get your blood pressure checked every six months to make sure the medicine is working correctly. If you don't feel any different or your blood pressure reading is fine, it doesn't mean you can stop taking your medicine – **it means it's working!** Never stop taking your medication without speaking to your GP.

# Remembering to take your medicine!



Your medicine can't work if you don't take it! Try some of the following tips if you find yourself forgetting your medicine:



Set an alarm or reminder on your phone



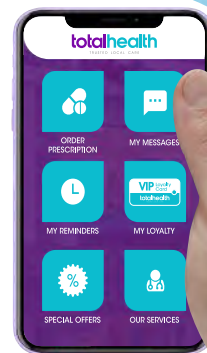
Take at the same time as something you do every day, such as eat breakfast



Try a medication reminder app on your phone



Download the 'totalhealth' app to set a medicine reminder and much more\*!



\*App services available in selected branches

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# Alcohol: is it worth the shot?

You've probably heard that red wine can improve your heart? Well, the key is to keep it in moderation.

Drinking too much alcohol regularly can raise your blood pressure. Stick to low-risk drinking to reduce your risk of high blood pressure and other alcohol-related health problems.

## Low-Risk Weekly Limits\*

Up to **17** standard drinks



Up to **11** standard drinks

Spread out over 1 week, no more than 6 standard drinks per session, 2-3 alcohol-free days each week

\*Source: HSE Low-Risk Alcohol Guidelines

Binge Drinking adds further risk to your health by forcing your blood pressure to rise quickly, as well as other health issues. Space out drinking to no more than 6 standard drinks in a row for men, 5 in a row for women.

## Standard Drink Examples



1 Alcopop (275mls)



A half pint of normal beer (4% volume)



A pub measure of spirits (35.5mls)



A small glass of wine (100mls)

# Find a Healthy Weigh to Live

Being overweight means your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body, which, in turn, raises your blood pressure level.

Additionally, being overweight or obese drastically increases your risk of heart disease, diabetes and high cholesterol.

Losing even 10% of excess weight can help lower your blood pressure. Aim for steady and healthy weight loss of 1-2lbs per week.

## Aim for a healthy BMI


Body Mass Index (BMI) is a guide for how healthy your weight is for your height. It indicates where you fall in a range from underweight to morbidly obese. A healthy BMI is between 18.5-25

## Measure your Waist

Excess weight around the belly is particularly dangerous. Women with a waist measurement of over 31.5 inches, and men with a waist measurement of over 37 inches, are at increased risk of diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure.

**Ask your local totalhealth  
Pharmacy team to  
measure your BMI & Waist**

\*Source: Healthy Ireland Survey, 2019



**60% of Irish  
people are  
overweight  
or obese\***

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# Top Tips for Heart-Healthy Eating

Eating a healthy, balanced diet not only helps you manage your weight; it can also help ensure you get all the nutrients you need to keep your blood pressure in check.

If everyone in Ireland reduced their salt intake by a half teaspoon (3 grams per day), this would prevent approximately 900 deaths each year from stroke and heart attack.\*

\*Source: Irish Heart Foundation

**EAT LESS SALT** as it raises your blood pressure. Aim to eat less than 6g a day (less than a teaspoon full). 70% of the salt we eat comes in processed foods so the easiest step to take is to cook from scratch as much as possible.

**EAT MORE FIBRE** from foods like wholegrain pasta, porridge, brown rice, or brown bread.

**GET YOUR 5-7 PORTIONS A DAY** of vegetables and fruits, which provide vitamins, minerals & fibre that can help reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. A standard portion is 80g, e.g. 1 piece of medium fruit, 1 dessert bowl of salad, or 2 tablespoons of vegetables.

**MORE GOOD FATS** and less bad fats. Avoid saturated fats by choosing leaner meat and low-fat dairy, and eating good fat sources like nuts, avocados or olive oil.

**EAT MORE FISH** which is not only an excellent protein source, but is also rich in vitamins & other nutrients. Oily fish is rich in Omega 3 which can help protect your heart.

**CUT DOWN ON CAFFEINE** More than 4 cups of coffee a day can raise your blood pressure. Make sure you balance caffeine-containing drinks with plenty of water.

# Fit in more Fitness

Being physically active can reduce your chances of developing a chronic disease by up to 50%\*

By being as active as possible, you can lower your blood pressure by keeping your heart and blood vessels in good condition. Regular exercise can also help you lose weight, which in turn will benefit your blood pressure.

**Adults up to the age of 65 must aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity 5 times a week**

You don't have to join a gym or buy fancy gear. Make small changes gradually and build up your fitness – take the stairs, park a little further away from work, go for a walk at lunchtime. Aim to take 10,000 steps every day and find an activity you enjoy and will stick to.

Consult a healthcare professional before making significant changes to your activity level, especially if you suffer from any illness or take regular medication.

\*Source: HSE

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## Other Risk Factors



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### Medical Issues

There are some illnesses that can lead to high blood pressure, including diabetes, cholesterol, and kidney disease. There are also medicines which may increase your blood pressure, such as the contraceptive pill. Your totalhealth Pharmacist can advise you on whether your medicine or condition puts you at risk of high blood pressure.

### Quality Sleep

Getting enough good sleep is important for your overall health and immune system. Getting less than 7-8 hours of sleep over prolonged periods has been found to increase blood pressure.

### Stop Smoking

Smoking and high blood pressure cause your arteries to narrow, increasing your risk of heart disease dramatically. Quitting Smoking is the most significant improvement you can make to your general health, with your body starting to recover in just 20 minutes.

Ask your local  
totalhealth Pharmacy  
team about what  
method of quitting  
is best for you



We at totalhealth Pharmacy  
want to help you  
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Selected pharmacies offer blood pressure measurement for eligible customers and patients. Your totalhealth Pharmacist is always available for advice & support.

