

Managing your blood pressure



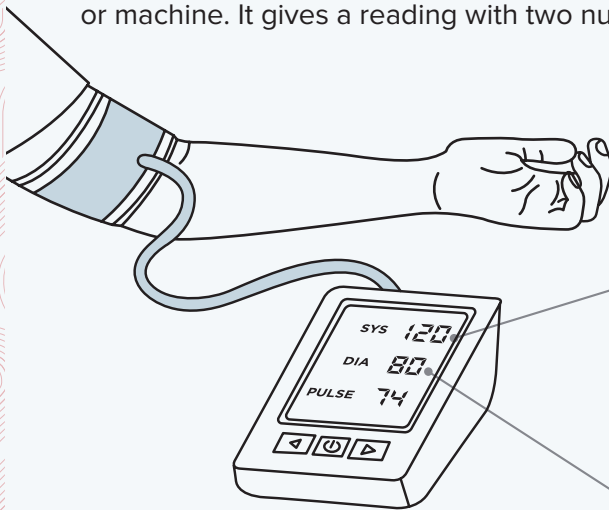
What is blood pressure?

Your heart pumps blood around your body. Each time your heart beats, blood pushes against the walls of your arteries. The strength of this pushing is your blood pressure.

Your blood pressure changes through the day. It's lower when you're asleep or relaxing and it goes up when you move around. It can also increase with stress, or after stimulants like caffeine or nicotine.

How is blood pressure measured?

Blood pressure is measured using a blood pressure monitor or machine. It gives a reading with two numbers.



The **top number (systolic)** is the pressure in your arteries when your heart pumps.

The **bottom number (diastolic)** is the pressure when your heart relaxes.

My blood pressure reading

Date:

Reading:

What do the numbers mean?

For most people an ideal blood pressure is **120/80 or lower**.

For people already on high blood pressure medication, the target blood pressure is **130/80 or lower**.

However, the blood pressure that is ideal for you depends on many factors, including your overall risk of heart attack and stroke. Ask your doctor or nurse about your target.

Blood pressure	Top number (systolic)	Bottom number (diastolic)
Low	Less than 90	Less than 60
Ideal	Less than 120	Less than 80
Normal	120–129	80–84
Normal to high	130–139	85–89
High	Above 140	Above 90

What is high blood pressure?

A single high blood pressure reading doesn't always mean you have high blood pressure. It needs to be diagnosed by a doctor or nurse. Usually, you're said to have high blood pressure if your blood pressure stays high for:

- 3 separate readings
- on 3 separate occasions
- over at least 3 months.

The clinical term for high blood pressure is hypertension.

Why high blood pressure matters

High blood pressure is the leading preventable cause of heart disease, and it contributes to thousands of deaths in New Zealand each year.

It puts extra strain on your heart and arteries and can cause:

- heart attack
- stroke
- heart failure
- atrial fibrillation
- blood vessel damage
- kidney damage
- eye damage
- dementia.

What are the symptoms?

In most cases, high blood pressure has no symptoms. The only way to know you have high blood pressure is to have it checked, or check it yourself using a home monitor.



You can monitor your blood pressure at home. Scan the QR code to find out more.



Pete's story

Pete ignored a high blood pressure reading and later suffered a life-threatening aortic dissection. Now he encourages everyone to keep an eye on their blood pressure.

"You might feel fine, like I did, but high blood pressure can be silently doing damage."

What increases the risk?

High blood pressure doesn't always have a single cause, but several risk factors can raise your chance of having it. Some of these factors you can't change, like your age or family history.

Risk factors you can change or manage:



too much salt
and processed
foods



alcohol
intake



smoking



unhealthy
weight



not moving
enough



stress



sleep apnoea
(breathing
stops and
starts during
sleep)



diabetes



kidney
disease



Blood pressure medication

Taking your blood pressure medication every day, as prescribed, reduces your risk of heart attack and stroke. Set a daily reminder to take medications, and a calendar reminder to order a repeat prescription before you run out.

My blood pressure pills:

Ways to lower your blood pressure

Small changes can make a big difference to your blood pressure. Here are some suggestions to try. Making long-term changes will reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.



Sit less, move more

Aim for at least 2½ hours (150 minutes) of moderate activity each week.



Maintain a healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy weight will help you manage your blood pressure.



Reduce salt

Reducing sodium (found in salt) in your diet reduces blood pressure.



Don't drink alcohol or drink less

No alcohol is best for heart health. If you do drink alcohol – it's better to drink less.



If you smoke, quit smoking

Quitting smoking will help lower your blood pressure and is important for your heart health.



Eat food that is good for your heart

Eat real foods that are less processed. Include lots of whole grains, fruit and vegetables, and healthy fats such as nuts, seeds and oily fish.

Some changes I can make:

High blood pressure and heart attack risk

High blood pressure is a leading cause of heart attack and strokes.

Other risk factors that can increase your heart attack risk include high cholesterol, diabetes, lack of exercise, alcohol intake, weight, unhealthy food, and smoking.

The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of heart attack.

A **heart risk check** will tell you your risk of a heart attack or stroke over the next five years. It is done by your GP or nurse. Ask your doctor when you're due for one.

Our online heart health check gives an estimate of your heart attack risk and when you're due your first check with your doctor. It also shows how lowering your blood pressure reduces your risk.



My current estimated risk of a heart attack and stroke is:

Low Medium High %



You have
the power to
improve your
heart health



How often should I check my blood pressure?

Adults should have their blood pressure checked once a year. This may be more often if you're on blood pressure medication.

Where can I check my blood pressure?

Checks are available from your doctor, nurse, or most pharmacies. You can also buy a home monitor.

High blood pressure checklist

- I know changes I can make to manage my blood pressure
- I know where to find information on how to use a home monitor correctly
- I know my risk of heart attack and stroke
- I know my blood pressure medications and when to take them
- I've reviewed the blood pressure resources on the Heart Foundation website

Looking for information on blood pressure?

Scan this QR code, call our Heart Line on 0800 863 375
or visit heartfoundation.org.nz/blood-pressure

