

## 7 lifestyle tips to help reduce blood pressure

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High blood pressure (or hypertension) is one of the most important risk factors for the development of heart disease and stroke. Our blood pressure can be influenced by many factors, including our genes, diseases such as kidney disease, certain medications and lifestyle. For most of us, lifestyle factors play the biggest role in increasing – or decreasing – our blood pressure.



Figure 1. Tips to improve blood pressure.

## [1. Reduce salt intake](#)

[Salt](#), or sodium chloride, has been used to flavour and preserve foods for thousands of years and is present in a variety of foods. Sodium and chloride are essential for many body functions, one of which is helping to manage the fluid balance of our blood, regulating our blood pressure. Unfortunately, eating too much salt

can disturb this balance and leads to an increase in blood pressure. The European Food Safety Authority recommends we consume no more than 5 g of salt per day (around 1 teaspoon) to help reduce our risk of high blood pressure and heart disease.<sup>1</sup>

## [2. Eat enough potassium](#)

Much like high amounts of salt, low intakes of potassium have also been associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure.<sup>2</sup> Potassium is needed for many body processes and like sodium it helps maintain the fluid balance of our blood, regulating our blood pressure. By consuming enough potassium, you can help counterbalance the negative effects of sodium and keep blood pressure in a healthy range. Potassium can be found in many fruits and vegetables, such as bananas, potatoes, spinach and lentils.

## [3. Eat a balanced diet](#)

In addition to salt and potassium, our blood pressure may also be influenced by other nutrients. Eating a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, that is low in saturated fat, [sugars](#) and salt, can ensure we get a variety of beneficial nutrients and help maintain energy balance, keeping our blood pressure healthy.

Many dietary approaches have been shown to reduce blood pressure, the most effective of which are thought to be the [Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension \(DASH\)](#) and the [Mediterranean Diet](#).<sup>3</sup>

## [4. Maintain a healthy body weight](#)

Maintaining a healthy body weight is one of the most important factors when it comes to managing our blood pressure.<sup>4</sup> As body weight increases, the demand on the heart also increases. This often leads to an increase in blood pressure. Our body weight is [regulated by a complex system](#) influenced by a variety of biological, psychological and environmental factors. These factors differ between people and mean it can be more difficult for some people to lose and maintain weight compared to others. When it comes to weight loss we must [burn more calories than we consume](#). However, there is no 'one size fits all' approach to weight loss and the 'best' approach is the one that can be enjoyed and stuck to long-term.

## [5. Be physically active](#)

[Physical activity](#) has been continually shown to [benefit both body and mind](#). This includes a positive effect on blood pressure. Regular physical activity can increase our heart's strength, which reduces the effort needed to pump blood around the body. This decreases the force on our arteries, reducing blood pressure. The World Health Organization recommends we do a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate activity (e.g. brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous activity (e.g. running) every week.<sup>5</sup> This equates to 30 minutes of moderate activity five days per week. Increasing levels above this threshold will provide additional benefits.

## [6. Don't smoke](#)

Smoking cigarettes can cause the build of fatty material on the walls of our arteries. This leads to an increase in blood pressure and can cause clogging in our arteries, which increases the risk of a heart attack and stroke. If you smoke, quitting is the single most important lifestyle change you can make to protect your long-term health. One of the many health benefits of not smoking is a reduced risk of high blood pressure.<sup>6</sup>

## 7. Limit alcohol intake

Much like smoking, a high intake of alcohol can have several negative health effects. One of these is an increased risk of high blood pressure.<sup>7</sup> A low-risk level of alcohol has been estimated at around 100 g of alcohol per week, equivalent to five, two-unit drinks (e.g. 200 ml of 12.5% vol wine; 500 ml of 5% vol beer) a week.<sup>8</sup> However, recommendations vary across European countries and health organisations.<sup>9</sup>

Table 1. Alcohol recommendation from different health organisations.

Organisation	Recommendation
European Code Against Cancer <sup>10</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you drink alcohol of any type, limit your intake. Not drinking is better for cancer prevention.</li> </ul>
European Society for Cardiology (ESC) 2016 <sup>11</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate alcohol consumption [up to 20 g/day (2 units of 12.5% vol wine; 500 ml of 5% vol beer) for men and 10 g/day (100 ml of 12.5% vol wine; 250 ml of 5% vol beer) for women] is acceptable for those who drink alcoholic beverages, provided it does not harm good health.</li> </ul>

### In summary

High blood pressure is one of the leading risk factors for the development of heart disease and stroke. Our blood pressure is influenced by several factors. Avoiding smoking, staying active, eating a balanced diet and limiting intakes of salt and alcohol can greatly reduce our risk of high blood pressure.