

# LOVE YOUR HEART

A South Asian guide  
to controlling your  
blood pressure



**Blood Pressure UK**

Helping you to lower your  
blood pressure

**South Asia consists of the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.**

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 premature 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.



## ♥ Why does high blood pressure matter?

If your reading is 140 over 90 or higher, over a number of weeks 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.

# 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.

The pressure is at it's highest when the heart beats. This is called the systolic pressure (top number), and should be around 120 or less.

The pressure is at it's lowest when the heart relaxes (rests) in between beats. This is called the diastolic pressure (bottom number), and should be around 80 or less.

Blood pressure is therefore expressed as two numbers, systolic and diastolic. Blood pressure is measured in 'millimetres of mercury' (mmHg).

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.

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

## BP reading

## What this means

## What you need to do

**Less than  
120 over 80**

Your blood pressure is normal and healthy

Re-check in 5 years. Follow a healthy lifestyle to keep your blood pressure at this level

**Between  
121 over 81 and  
139 over 89**

Your blood pressure is a little higher than it should be. You maybe at risk of developing high blood pressure in later life, and you should try to lower it

Re-check in a year.  
Make healthy changes to your lifestyle

**140 over 90, or  
higher (over a  
number of weeks)**

You have high blood pressure

Change your lifestyle - see your GP, practice nurse, or pharmacist and take any medications they may give you

# 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 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.

**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.**

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 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 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.

# Healthy lifestyle and blood pressure

Keeping active 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 energy your body needs by being more active. You also need to reduce the amount of energy you take in by eating less food high in fat, sugar and salt.

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. For example, take the stairs instead of a lift, walk more each day, cycle to work, or get off the bus one stop earlier.



## 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 and smoking shisha 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.



Try adding fresh vegetables and pulses in curries

# Healthy eating and blood pressure

## Salt

Eating too much salt raises your blood pressure. Adults should eat less than 6 grams (about one teaspoon) of salt a day, but most of us eat much more. It's never too late to cut down on salt – it only takes three weeks on average for our taste buds to adjust.

Try to add less salt when cooking or at the table. Why not try reducing your salt intake little by little, as a gradual reduction is often not even noticeable until you are adding no salt.

For example, if you like to eat papadums as a snack or accompaniment, try to limit the number of times you eat them in a week, as they're high in salt. Don't add salt to rice and paratha, chapatti or poori, as the flavour of curries and pickles will naturally enhance their flavour. You can also swap salt for

more of the herbs and spices that you may already use in your cooking, such as dhana jeera (coriander and cumin powder), haldi (turmeric), garam masala, mustard seeds, coriander, curry leaves, lemon/lime juice and tamarind.

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, biscuits or processed foods. Spice mixes, sauces, chutneys and pickles can also contain a lot of salt. Always read the labels and choose the options with the least salt.

## Swap salt for spices



## 🍷 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, pulses and lentils (dahl) to curries and keema. For example in Chana/Chole (chickpea) add spinach. Or to potato curry add peas or cauliflower. A mixed vegetable curry, bhindi (okra), or bitter melon are also quick, tasty and nutritious dishes to make. You can also add a salad to eat with your meals.

Replace sweet snacks with fresh or dried fruit. Try to vary what fruit and vegetables you eat each day. Fresh, dried, frozen and tinned are all fine, but watch out for added salt and sugar like salted water in tinned foods and sugar in syrup. When making chaat add fruits like watermelon, pineapple, pomegranate and even avocado.



## 🍷 Alcohol

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

The recommended limits for BOTH men and women are no more than 14 units a week. 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 food high in fat will cause you to gain weight, which raises your blood pressure. Foods high in fat also raise your cholesterol levels, raising your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Fats like butter, ghee and palm oil are high in saturated fat. Try to limit the number of meals with these ingredients, and don't add butter or ghee to bread, chapattis or rice.

Olive oil (can be used for dressing) or sunflower oil and rapeseed oil (can be used for frying and cooking) are better for you, but, but they are still fats. When you are cooking, measure the oil that you use, and try to use less.



**Ghee is high in saturated fat**

## ♥ Wholegrains

Try to choose more wholegrains or higher fibre foods with less added fat, salt and sugar. This could be using brown rice when making Poha (flattened or broken rice) or the type of flour used to make chapatti/roti, such as sorghum, or jowar flour. It is high in minerals, fibre, protein, and antioxidants. It is also high in potassium, which helps lower blood pressure.



**Try to measure the oil that you use**

For an in-depth guide to healthy eating for the South Asian community take a look at the **South Asian Eatwell Guide**. Developed from the UK's Eatwell Guide specifically for those from a South Asian background to help them make better food choices that represent their different cultural needs.



**Samosas are a popular fried snack but why not try baking them instead?**

## The South Asian Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving (150g) contains

Energy 1000kcal 2000kcal	Fat 20.0g	Saturated 1.5g	Sugars 3.0g	Salt 0.5g
LOW	LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
13%	4%	7%	38%	15%

of an adult's reference intake  
Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 897kJ/167kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars

Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar



Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.

Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.



Eat less often and in small amounts

Eat more beans and pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins  
sourced fish per week, 2 portions of sustainably  
red and processed meat

Choose lower fat and lower sugar options



Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts



Per day 2000kcal 2500kcal = ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS

South Asian Eatwell Guide created by Fareeha Jay. A UK registered Dietitian with a special interest in the South Asian diet.

# 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.

Many people find that one medicine alone will not lower their blood pressure enough and may have to take two, three or even four different medications. 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



There are also a number of other risk factors for heart disease and stroke that people of South Asian origin are at higher risk of. 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. If you have high blood pressure and diabetes, your risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney failure is even higher. A healthy lifestyle to lower your blood pressure will help lower your risk of diabetes.

## ♥ Cholesterol

High levels of cholesterol in your blood can raise your risk of a heart attack or stroke. If you have high blood pressure and cholesterol, your risk is even higher. Eating well and keeping active can lower both. Your doctor can also give you medicines to lower your cholesterol, if you need them.

## Take action

Your blood pressure is very important, no matter your age. Making the changes in this booklet now will keep you in good habits that will help you live to a healthy old age.

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?

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.bloodpressureuk.org](http://www.bloodpressureuk.org)

## About Blood Pressure UK

We are the UK's leading blood pressure charity - lowering the nation's blood pressure to prevent stroke, heart attack and heart disease. High blood pressure can be successfully treated and prevented. We are here to help.

For more information, please contact:

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Blood Pressure UK is a registered charity and we rely on donations to help us carry out our work. We would be grateful for any donation you can make towards the cost of producing this booklet.

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