



High Blood Pressure / Hypertension: Symptoms, Causes, Diagnosis, Treatment and Prevention

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High blood pressure, or hypertension, occurs when the force of blood pushing against your blood vessel walls is higher than it should be. It often does not cause obvious symptoms, but over time it can increase the risk of serious health problems like [heart disease / cardiovascular disease](#), heart attack, [stroke](#), [chronic kidney disease](#), and vascular dementia.

High blood pressure often goes hand in hand with other chronic conditions, especially [diabetes](#) and [obesity](#). Because it is usually silent, many people do not realise they have it until it is picked up on a routine check.

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What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is shown as two numbers, like 130/80. In the UK, it is generally considered high if it is 140/90 or above when measured by a healthcare professional, or 135/85 or above when measured at home.

A high reading does not always mean you have permanent hypertension right away. Your GP, pharmacy, or clinic might suggest repeat checks, home monitoring, or a 24-hour monitor to see if your blood pressure stays high over time.

Symptoms of high blood pressure

High blood pressure does not usually cause symptoms. That is why it is often described as a silent condition. The only reliable way to know whether you have it is to get it checked.

- Headaches
- Blurred vision
- Chest pain

Because these symptoms are not specific, hypertension can be missed or confused with other health problems. Long-term uncontrolled blood pressure can also increase the risk of conditions linked to memory and thinking, including [dementia](#).

When to get medical help

Get help from NHS 111 if you often have headaches or blurred vision, if you have chest pain that comes and goes, or if you have other symptoms you are worried could be caused by high blood pressure.

Call 999 straight away if you get chest pain or discomfort that does not go away, pain spreading to the arm, neck, jaw, stomach or back, or chest pain with sweating, nausea, light-headedness or shortness of breath. These can be signs of a heart attack.

What causes high blood pressure?

High blood pressure usually develops over time. It can be linked to lifestyle, family history, age, and other medical conditions. Physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use, excess alcohol, diabetes, and obesity all raise the risk.

Main risk factors

Older age	Family history of high blood pressure
Unhealthy diet, especially one high in salt	Being overweight or having obesity
Smoking or other tobacco use	Drinking too much alcohol
Long-term stress	Physical inactivity
Diabetes	Higher NHS-listed risk in some Black African, Black Caribbean, or South Asian ethnic groups

How high blood pressure is diagnosed

A blood pressure check is done with a cuff around the upper arm. If the first reading is high, you may be asked to repeat it at home, return for another reading later, or wear a portable monitor that takes readings over 24 hours. This helps confirm whether your blood pressure is consistently high.

Regular checking matters because high blood pressure often has no symptoms. NHS advice says people aged 40 or over should get it checked if they have not had a reading in more than 5 years, and many pharmacies in England offer free checks for over-40s.

Treatment options for high blood pressure

Treatment usually involves a combination of lifestyle changes and, for some people, medicines. Some people can improve control with lifestyle steps alone, while others need medication as well.

Lifestyle treatment

- Eating a healthy, balanced diet
- Being physically active
- Aiming for at least 150 minutes of exercise a week
- Losing weight if overweight
- Reducing salt
- Not smoking
- Reducing alcohol
- Limiting excess caffeine

These same steps also support the related pages on [heart disease / cardiovascular disease](#), [stroke](#), [diabetes](#), [obesity](#), and [chronic kidney disease](#).

Medicines

A GP will usually prescribe medicine if your blood pressure is very high, if you are at higher risk of problems such as heart attack or stroke, or if it stays high after lifestyle changes. Most blood pressure medicines are tablets taken once a day, and some people need more than one medicine to keep it under control.

Can high blood pressure be prevented?

In many cases, yes. Prevention focuses on healthy eating, keeping to a healthier weight, exercising regularly, not smoking, and cutting down on salt and excess alcohol.

Because high blood pressure is so closely linked with [stroke](#), [heart disease / cardiovascular disease](#), and [chronic kidney disease](#), prevention can make a meaningful difference to long-term health.

Living with high blood pressure

Many people live well with hypertension, but it usually needs ongoing monitoring. That may mean regular blood pressure checks, medication reviews, and support with diet, activity, smoking, alcohol, and weight management. Lowering blood pressure even a small amount can help reduce the risk of future problems.

Questions to ask your doctor

- Is my blood pressure consistently high or does it need more monitoring?
- Should I check my blood pressure at home?
- What should my target blood pressure be?
- Do I need medicine, or should I try lifestyle changes first?
- Which changes would make the biggest difference for me?
- How often should I have my blood pressure checked?
- What warning signs should I treat as urgent?

Final thought

High blood pressure is common and often silent, but it is also one of the most manageable risk factors in long-term health. Regular checks, earlier treatment, and consistent lifestyle changes can all lower the risk of serious complications.

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