

# High blood pressure

Your blood pressure is the pressure of blood in the arteries as it is being pumped around the body by your heart. High blood pressure (hypertension) can increase the risk of stroke, heart disease, kidney disease and eye problems. Diabetes and high blood pressure often occur together.

## What causes high blood pressure?

There are several factors that increase blood pressure. Many of these are also risk factors for type 2 diabetes:

- > family history
- > increasing age
- > carrying excess weight
- > stress
- > inactivity
- > smoking, alcohol and salt

## How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

Blood pressure does not stay the same all the time. People with high blood pressure usually have no symptoms. Your doctor and diabetes educator should check your blood pressure regularly. If your reading is high your doctor will probably measure it again on several occasions to confirm that it is too high. Sometimes they may recommend that you check your own blood pressure at home or arrange for you to have a 24 hour recording with a portable machine.

## What do the numbers mean?

When the heart pumps blood it continually goes through two phases.

1. The **squeezing (systolic) phase** when your heart contracts and pumps blood to the major arteries.
2. The **relaxing (diastolic) phase** when the heart is relaxed and filling with blood.

When blood pressure is recorded it is expressed as two numbers which represent the two phases of blood pressure. A blood pressure of 130/85 means the systolic blood pressure is 130 and the diastolic blood pressure is 85. When you have diabetes we aim for a blood pressure of less than 130/80.



## What can I do if I have high blood pressure?

Your lifestyle is very important in helping you to control high blood pressure and reduce the risk of complications.

- > **Give up Smoking:** call Quitline 137 848.
- > **Reduce your salt intake:** aim for products less than 400mg/100g of sodium.
- > **Watch your weight:** choose a variety of foods that are low in fat, in particular, saturated fat, low in salt and high in fibre, vitamins and minerals.
- > **Limit alcohol:** up to 2 standard alcohol drinks each day. Note: individual advice from your doctor, dietitian or diabetes educator is recommended.
- > **Exercise:** include at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. Note: some types of exercise should be avoided by people with high blood pressure. Check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program.
- > **Relax:** this is easier said than done, but you can learn to relax and cope with stress. Tai chi, meditation, yoga and relaxation classes can all help. Ask your doctor or diabetes educator for advice about stress management techniques.

## What about medication?

For many people lifestyle changes alone are not enough to control high blood pressure and so medications will also be needed. If medication has been prescribed for you it is important to remember to take it even if you feel perfectly well. Don't stop taking your medication or change the dose without talking to your doctor first.



## How often should I have my blood pressure checked?

- > If your blood pressure is on target, keep checking and recording your numbers every 3-6 months.
- > If your blood pressure is off target (greater than 130/80), consider lifestyle and medication to bring it under control.
- > Consider getting a blood pressure (BP) machine at home and check your numbers to make sure that you stay on target. Your pharmacist can advise on BP machines that are easy to use and give reliable results. Talk to your doctor for advice about how often to check. This may be 2-6 times a week or more depending on your numbers. Best times to check are before breakfast, lunch, tea and bed. Build up a profile across the day so that you and your doctor can see that the lifestyle and medication is working all day, every day.

### Example of record chart

Date & time	Systolic number	Diastolic number	Comments
Monday 8am	140	80	Awake for 1 hour
Wednesday 1pm	160	75	Busy morning
Friday 6pm	145	60	

### Key points to remember

Whether you have high blood pressure or not it is important to look at the other factors that may damage your arteries and increase your risk of a heart attack and stroke. Review your lifestyle – are you a smoker? Could you ‘eat less, walk more’? What are your stress levels? You may be able to change your lifestyle or maybe there’s a medication that could help. Talk to your doctor, work out a lifestyle and medication schedule and prevent problems before they occur.



### Where can I go for more information?

Your local doctor or diabetes educator

Diabetes Outreach [www.diabetesoutreach.org.au/consumer](http://www.diabetesoutreach.org.au/consumer)

Diabetes Australia [www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au)

Heart Foundation [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

National Prescribing Service [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

**High blood pressure can damage your blood vessels  
Get your blood pressure checked regularly**

#### Diabetes Outreach

8 Woodville Rd  
Woodville South SA 5011  
Telephone: (08) 8222 6775  
[www.diabetesoutreach.org.au](http://www.diabetesoutreach.org.au)

Disclaimer: This resource is not a substitute for, nor is it intended to replace, the services of a qualified health practitioner.