

Patient information from BMJ

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High blood pressure: what are the treatment options?

Having high blood pressure increases your chance of serious health problems, like heart attacks and strokes. So it is important to try and reduce your blood pressure and stop it being too high.

There are treatments available, and there are also things you can do yourself. You can use the information in this leaflet to learn more about the options, and discuss with your doctor what treatments are right for you.

Lifestyle measures

You may be able to reduce your blood pressure by making changes to your lifestyle. These are usually the first things your doctor will suggest trying.

If you are overweight, you should try **losing some weight** to bring your blood pressure down. Even losing just a couple of pounds can help. Losing weight may also make other treatments work better and reduce how much medication you need.

Eating a type of diet called the **DASH** diet can help. DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension.

On this diet you eat:

- plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables
- more wholegrain products (such as brown rice and wholemeal bread) instead of white rice and white bread
- more fish, poultry, and nuts, instead of red meat
- less salt. Most of us eat more salt than we need. Many processed foods such as bread and breakfast cereal contain a lot of salt. Cutting out these can help a lot. Check the labels of your foods to find out how much salt they contain
- less saturated fat (butter, meat, cheese, and cream)
- fewer sugary foods, such as cakes and sweets, and fewer sugary drinks.

Your doctor might also recommend that you eat more foods that are high in potassium. These foods include:

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- some fresh fruits, such as bananas, oranges, melons, and grapefruit
- some dried fruits, such as raisins, prunes, and dates
- some vegetables, such as cooked broccoli, cooked spinach, potatoes, sweet potatoes, mushrooms, peas, and cucumbers.

Your doctor might also recommend a potassium supplement. Although this will not be recommended if you have chronic kidney disease or if you take certain medications.

Exercising is also important. Doctors recommend that people with high blood pressure aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes, five times a week. Examples of good types of exercise include walking, jogging, cycling or swimming.

You need to exercise regularly to keep your blood pressure down. If you stop exercising, it may rise again. Check with your doctor about what type of exercise routine might be best for you.

If you drink **alcohol**, reducing how much you drink can lower your blood pressure. Men with high blood pressure should not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week. Women with high blood pressure should aim for less than 8 units of alcohol a week.

Drinking too much **caffeine** can increase your blood pressure. Drinks that are high in caffeine include tea, coffee, cola, and energy drinks. Try to limit how much of these you are drinking. If you are unsure if you are having too much caffeine, speak with your doctor.

Smoking increases your chance of serious heart problems related to high blood pressure. So quitting smoking is important. You can ask your doctor for help.

Medications

There are many different types of medication that can lower your blood pressure.

You may need to take more than one medication to bring your blood pressure down to a healthy level.

Which medication (or medications) your doctor may recommend your try first will depend on:

- how high your blood pressure is
- your age
- your ethnicity, and
- whether you have other medical conditions, such as heart disease or kidney disease.

The main blood-pressure medications all work in slightly different ways. It often helps to take more than one. These are the main types that your doctor might recommend:

- ACE inhibitors
- Diuretics
- Angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARBs)
- Calcium channel blockers
- Beta-blockers.

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Some medications come as a combination pill. This means it has several types of treatment in one pill.

Some people find this easier to take.

You'll need regular appointments with your doctor to check on your blood pressure and your treatments. Some people get side effects from these medications. Talk with your doctor if you get any problems. You may be able to try a different type of medication, or a lower dose.

A common side effect with all blood pressure medications is feeling dizzy. It might be worse when you go from sitting or lying down to standing up, and it might be worse at night. This is called postural hypotension.

The other possible side effects vary with different medications, and from person to person. For example, ACE inhibitors can cause a dry cough in some people.

Common side effects for each medication will be listed in the leaflet that comes with your medication. If you notice any side effects when you start taking a new medication or change your dose, speak with your doctor.

Don't stop taking your medications without talking to your doctor. Most people are able to find treatments that work for them with few, if any, side effects.

There is more on the causes of high blood pressure in our patient information on: *High blood pressure: what is it?*

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