

# Know your numbers – blood pressure.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, rarely has noticeable symptoms. But if untreated, it increases your risk of serious problems such as heart attacks and strokes.



## Blood pressure.

Blood pressure is simply the pressure of the blood in your arteries. Everybody needs a certain amount of blood pressure to pump the blood around the body.

One in three adults in the UK have high blood pressure – that's 16 million people in total. It's also estimated that around a third of these people don't know about it, because it rarely has obvious symptoms.

That's why high blood pressure, which is also called hypertension, is known as the 'silent killer'. The only way to know whether you have it or not is to have your blood pressure checked.

## Causes of high blood pressure

There isn't always an explanation for the cause of high blood pressure, but these factors can play a part:

- Not doing enough physical activity
- Being overweight or obese
- Having too much salt in your diet
- Regularly drinking too much alcohol or
- Having a family history of high blood pressure

If you think you're at risk from any of these factors then you should check your pressure regularly.

## Measuring your blood pressure.

As many as 7 million people are living with undiagnosed high blood pressure in the UK.

Checking your blood pressure can be done by your GP or another healthcare professional, or you could check it yourself with a home testing kit.

**The British Heart Foundation recommends healthy adults aged over 40 should have their blood pressure checked at least once every five years.**

**If you are at an increased risk of high blood pressure, you should get checked more often, ideally once a year.**

Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (which is written as mmHg) and is recorded as two figures:

- Systolic pressure: the pressure of the blood when your heart beats to pump blood out
- Diastolic pressure: the pressure of the blood when your heart rests in between beats

For example, if your GP says your blood pressure is '120 over 80', or 120/80mmHg, it means you have a systolic pressure of 120mmHg and a diastolic pressure of 80mmHg.

## Your key numbers.

The British heart foundation says, that unless your doctor tells you otherwise, your blood pressure should be below 140/90mmHg.

If you have heart or circulatory disease, including being told you have coronary heart disease, angina, have diabetes or kidney disease, or have had a heart attack or stroke, then it is usually recommended that your blood pressure should be below 130/80mmHg.



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