

Manage your Blood Pressure!

For many people, lifestyle changes are sufficient to control blood pressure. For others, medication is also required. Follow the plan agreed with your doctor and do not stop taking your medication before talking to your doctor or pharmacist.

Monitoring your blood pressure is an important step towards keeping it within the normal range.

Blood pressure should be regularly monitored at home and sometimes checked by a health care professional.



For advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle:

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How much is your Blood Pressure?



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What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers. The systolic pressure is the force at which the heart pumps blood around the body. The diastolic blood pressure is the pressure in the arteries between heart beats when the heart is relaxing and filling with blood. Blood pressure may vary throughout the day. In adults, ideal blood pressure is between 90/60 and 120/80. Normal systolic blood pressure should be between 120 and 129mmHg and normal diastolic blood pressure between 80 and 84mmHg.

Low and high blood pressure

Low blood pressure is unlikely to cause any symptoms. However, if it drops too low (below 90/60mmHg), it can restrict the amount of blood flowing to the brain and other vital organs, which can cause unsteadiness, dizziness, light-headedness or fainting. Consult your doctor as required.

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, occurs when readings on separate occasions consistently show blood pressure to be more than 130/85mmHg. High blood pressure is a condition that often shows no symptoms. This is why it is called the silent killer. Rarely it causes headaches or vomiting.

Almost half of the Maltese adult population are living with high blood pressure. High blood pressure increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. These are the leading causes of death in Malta.

Guidelines for the Management of Arterial Hypertension. European Heart Journal, Volume 39, Issue 33, 01 September 2018, Pages 3021–3104, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurheartj/ehy339>



Am I at risk?

You can develop high blood pressure if you: eat an unhealthy diet high in saturated fat, salt, sugar and highly processed foods; are overweight or obese; do not exercise on a regular basis; consume alcohol; smoke; do not manage stress; have a family history of high blood pressure; are over 45 years of age; or have other diseases, such as diabetes.

Can I prevent it?

While age and family history cannot be changed, high blood pressure can be prevented or delayed by adopting a healthy lifestyle and controlling other diseases (if any).

Diet

A reduction of the amount of salt consumed, eating plenty of vegetables and fruit as well as a diet low in saturated and trans fat that includes lots of fibre, helps to reduce hypertension.

Salt and Sugar

As salt raises blood pressure, it is recommended that not more than a total of 5g of salt a day is consumed. Sugar-sweetened beverages should be avoided.



Alcohol

Drinking alcohol regularly will raise blood pressure over time. Alcohol is also high in calories, which will lead to weight gain. Reducing the intake of alcohol, having alcohol-free days and avoiding binge-drinking are all recommended.

Weight

Being overweight or obese forces the heart to work harder to pump blood around the body, which can raise blood pressure. Keeping a normal body weight reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure and other heart-related problems.

Smoking

Smoking may raise blood pressure and increases the risk of a heart attack, stroke and cancer. Smoking and having high blood pressure will cause the arteries to narrow. Quitting smoking and avoiding second-hand smoke is essential.

Exercise

Being active and carrying out regular exercise helps maintain a healthy weight, prevent and treat high blood pressure by keeping the heart and blood vessels in good condition. Adults should carry out at least 150-300 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (such as cycling or fast walking). One should aim at activity that makes you feel warm and slightly out of breath. Resistance exercises 2 to 3 times a week are also recommended. All physical activity counts.

Stress

Stress is an unavoidable fact of life. Finding effective ways to cope with stress is vital for physical and mental health. If you feel overwhelmed, talk to someone such as a trusted friend or a professional.

Controlling other diseases

If you have other diseases, follow the treatment plan as agreed with your doctor to keep them under control. Learn how to manage your condition yourself, thus identifying any early warning signs and seeking help when required.



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