

Who is most at risk?

Your chances of having high blood pressure increase as you get older. There is often no clear cause of high blood pressure but you are at increased risk if you:

- are overweight
- have a relative with high blood pressure
- are of African or Caribbean descent
- eat a lot of salt
- don't eat enough fruit and vegetables
- don't do enough exercise
- drink a lot of coffee (or other caffeine-based drinks)
- drink a lot of alcohol
- are aged over 65

Prevention and treatment

You can take steps to prevent high blood pressure by:

- losing weight if you need to
- exercising regularly
- eating a healthy diet
- cutting back if you drink a lot of alcohol
- stopping smoking
- cutting down on salt and caffeine

Pregnancy

If you are pregnant, it's important to have your blood pressure checked on a regular basis, even if it isn't high.

Watching your blood pressure while you are pregnant reduces your risk of developing pregnancy-induced hypertension.

This can lead to a serious condition called pre-eclampsia where there is a problem with the placenta (the organ that links the baby's blood supply to the mother's).

Cutting down on salt

People who have a lot of salt in their diet are more likely to have high blood pressure. Salt makes your body hold onto extra water, which can increase your blood pressure. Most people eat far more salt than they need. It is recommended that adults have no more than 6 grams of salt a day –that’s about one teaspoonful. It is the sodium in salt that contributes to high blood pressure. There is sodium in all types of salt, whether it’s salt in grains, crystals or flakes.

What you can do

- Cut down on processed foods that contain a lot of salt. Three-quarters of the salt we eat is hidden in processed foods such as ready meals, packet and canned soups, instant noodles, ketchups and sauces, sausages and burgers, and salty savoury snacks.
- Don’t add salt to your food at the table.
- Cook without adding any salt. Use extra pepper, herbs, garlic, spices or lemon juice to add flavour to your food instead.

Within a few weeks, your taste buds will change and you will get used to less salt and appreciate other flavours more.