

HYPERTENSION

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, can have many causes. However in at least 90% of cases the cause is unknown. Research into this condition is on going and there are currently several theories of possible causative factors.

In Western societies it is normal for the blood pressure to increase with age, whereas in many countries where people are not exposed to the excesses of a Western lifestyle, the blood pressure in fact decreases with age.

The consequences of prolonged high blood pressure include strokes, coronary heart disease and heart failure. It is therefore desirable to reduce blood pressure to an acceptable level. The following information covers dietary and lifestyle guidelines to help reduce blood pressure or help prevent hypertension developing in the first place.

BODY WEIGHT

In an individual who is over weight, the heart must pump harder to push the blood further and this increases pressure in the whole system. Losing weight reduces the requirements for this high pressure, and is of primary importance for the health of the circulation and the whole body.

EXERCISE

Increased exercise has been shown to be of benefit in reducing blood pressure. Exercise is also a valuable aid in losing weight and reduces the risk of heart disease. Thirty minutes of aerobic exercise 3 times a week is enough to make a difference. It is important to gradually build up your level of exercise, working at your own pace.

STRESS

Stress is difficult to avoid, and although a small amount of stress is probably good for us, we need to try and balance stress with relaxation. Tension in the body can raise blood pressure. Techniques used for relaxation will depend on individual preference, but these could include any of the following: yoga, meditation, exercise, relaxation tapes or any interests that are absorbing, nothing to do with work and remove you from the cause of the stress!

ALCOHOL

Alcohol consumption directly increases the blood pressure. It can also increase cholesterol levels and should ideally be avoided until the blood pressure is normalised.

CIGARETTE SMOKING

Although not directly associated with high blood pressure smoking does increase the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. This is particularly true when high blood pressure is combined with smoking.

CAFFEINE

Caffeine products including tea, coffee, chocolate, cocoa, and some soft drinks should be avoided, especially if there is stress, as caffeine is a stimulant to the nervous system.

HORMONAL THERAPY

The oral contraceptive and some types of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be associated with high blood pressure.

DIET Saturated Fats

A high intake of saturated fats is known to increase the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. Although saturated fats are not directly associated with high blood pressure, a high intake in the diet combined with high blood pressure will increase the risk of circulatory. Although saturated fats are not directly associated with high blood pressure, a

High intake in the diet combined with high blood pressure will increase the risk of circulatory problems. Saturated fats are high in red meat (such as beef, lamb, pork, ham, bacon), full fat milk, cheese, cream, butter and fried foods.

Salt

In societies where no salt is consumed, there is a zero incidence of high blood pressure. In any case of high blood pressure it is vital to reduce salt (sodium) intake. Processed and convenience foods are particularly high in salt. Increasing potassium rich foods is also important for high blood pressure, increase foods such as leafy greens and fruits; dandelion tea is also a rich source of potassium.

Fresh fruits and vegetables

Many of the vitamins and minerals found in fresh fruit and vegetables have been shown to be protective against

high blood pressures and beneficial in the reduction of raised blood pressure. 5 servings daily is recommended

Garlic

Garlic is a well-known tonic to the circulation, and if taken over time, can help to reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels in the blood. Fresh, raw garlic has the most medicinal benefit; alternatively high quality garlic capsules can be taken. The onion family in general is highly recommended, including fresh spring onions and leeks.

Fish oils

Omega fatty acids which are plentiful in oily fish such as mackerel, herring and sardines, are known to be beneficial to the circulation and a goods regular intake can reduce the risk of heart disease and circulatory disorders. Try to eat fish at least 2-3 times a week, especially the oily varieties.

Olive oil

This monosaturated oil can help to keep cholesterol levels down, especially when taken raw such as in a salad dressing.