



# BLOOD PRESSURE AND STROKE



## WHAT IS A STROKE?

A stroke is a brain attack.

Most strokes happen when a clot blocks the flow of blood to your brain. A less common cause of stroke is when a blood vessel bursts and bleeds into your brain.

A stroke can be fatal or cause long term disability. It can affect your ability to walk, talk, eat, see, read and do many other things you were able to do before the stroke.

## WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE?

As your blood travels around your body it puts pressure on your blood vessel walls. Blood pressure measures this.

Your blood pressure is expressed as two numbers e.g. 120/80. Said as "120 over 80".

- The higher number is your Systolic Pressure (e.g. 120). This is the pressure on your blood vessel walls as your heart pumps.
- The lower number is your Diastolic Pressure (e.g. 80). This is the pressure on your blood vessel walls as your heart rests between pumps.

# HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

There is no ‘ideal’ blood pressure. However for most people, lower is better. The following levels are provided only as a guide.

	Systolic	Diastolic
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
High normal	120-139	80-89
High blood pressure	Greater than 140	Greater than 90

Blood pressure typically varies throughout the day. Before you are diagnosed with high blood pressure, your doctor will usually measure your blood pressure on a number of occasions to make sure that the reading is consistent. You may be asked to monitor your blood pressure at home.

## HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND STROKE

**High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke.**

High blood pressure puts strain on all the blood vessels throughout your body, including the ones in your brain.

This strain can damage your blood vessels, causing them to become harder and narrower. The vessels are then more likely to block causing a stroke.

On rare occasions the extra strain may weaken a blood vessel in your brain. This blood vessel may then burst causing a stroke.

High blood pressure can also increase the risk of other health conditions such as heart attack and kidney failure.

## WHAT CAUSES HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

For most people there is no specific cause for high blood pressure. Blood pressure tends to rise as we get older. Men are more likely to have high blood pressure than women. High blood pressure can also run in families.

Factors which can increase your risk of high blood pressure include:

- being overweight
- smoking
- drinking too much alcohol
- not exercising
- eating an unhealthy diet
- eating too much salt
- diabetes



# TIPS TO CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

- **Get your blood pressure checked regularly.**  
High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. You can reduce your risk of stroke by knowing if you have high blood pressure and seeking treatment.
- **Eat less processed food and more fresh fruit, vegetables, grains and lean meat.** This will help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight. It will also help to reduce your risk of diabetes and high blood cholesterol (another risk factor for stroke).
- **Reduce your intake of salt. Salt increases blood pressure.** Around 75% of the salt we eat comes from processed foods such as takeaways, processed meats, instant noodles and sauces. By eating more fresh food you will automatically reduce your intake of salt. Checking food labels to select lower salt options and not adding salt to food will also help to reduce your intake. Aim for no more than one teaspoon (6g) of salt from all food sources each day
- **Don't smoke.**
- **If you drink alcohol, keep your intake low.**  
No more than two standard drinks per day for women and three standard drinks for men. Aim for at least two alcohol-free days per week
- **Limit your consumption of coffee and caffeine.**  
Aim for no more than the equivalent of five cups of coffee per day.
- **Get active.** Sit less and aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

If lifestyle changes are not enough to reduce your blood pressure, you may also require medicine.

# SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR ANNUAL BLOOD PRESSURE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN PARTNERS



For more information contact  
**0800 STROKE (78 76 53)**

or visit our website

**[www.stroke.org.nz](http://www.stroke.org.nz)**