

Hypertension

The Health Column

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Hypertension (high blood pressure) is a significant risk factor for heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases. However, this condition can be prevented and managed through healthy lifestyle behaviours such as regular physical exercise, maintaining a healthy diet and weight, limiting alcohol intake and quitting smoking.

Hypertension can be monitored through regular measurement of blood pressure and managed with the use of blood pressure lowering medications.

Blood pressure is the pressure of your blood against the inner walls of your arteries as it is pumped around the body by your heart.

As your heart pumps, the flow of blood in your arteries and your blood pressure rises and falls in a regular 'wave' pattern. Blood pressure peaks when your heart pumps (called 'systole') and falls when your heart relaxes (called 'diastole').

A Heart Foundation Survey completed in 2010 found one in three Australians aged 30-65 years had been told by a doctor that they have high blood pressure. This equates to 3.5 million Australians. These figures correlate with official Australian Bureau of Statistics data which shows that in 2011-12, almost one-third (31.6%) of all adult Australians had hypertension, comprising 21.5% of people with high blood pressure and 10.1% with normal blood pressure who were taking hypertension medications. Of these, almost half (48.8%) self-reported having a current and long-term heart or circulatory condition.

Men were more likely to have hypertension than women (34.1% compared with 29.1% respectively).

There are often no symptoms or signs of high blood pressure - you can have high blood pressure and feel well. Therefore, it is important that you have regular blood pressure checks. The only way to find out if your blood pressure is high is by having it checked regularly by a health professional, and your pharmacist can quickly take your blood pressure for you.

However, there are ways you can help keep your blood pressure healthy and recognising factors that increase the risks of serious problems associated with high blood pressure is important. Among the prime triggers are smoking, having high cholesterol, being overweight and having diabetes.



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There is no firm rule about what defines high blood pressure but the more we know about it the better. To raise awareness of the issue, the World Hypertension League initiated the *World Hypertension Day* which is held every May 17. This year the theme is *Know your Blood Pressure* and people around the world are asked to participate in a Global Hypertension Awareness Survey, (www.worldhypertensionleague.org) and by getting their blood pressure measured either at home, or at a doctor's clinic or at your local pharmacy.

“What is normal blood pressure?” is asked frequently. For most people, the lower the blood pressure the better. However, the following figures are a useful guide.

- Normal blood pressure: generally less than 120/80 mmHg (i.e. systolic blood pressure less than 120 and diastolic blood pressure less than 80 mmHg).
- Normal to high blood pressure: between 120/80 and 140/90 mmHg.
- High blood pressure: 140/90 mmHg or higher. If your blood pressure is 180/110 mmHg or higher, you have very high blood pressure.

Your lifestyle is very important in helping you to manage high blood pressure and its associated risks. Your doctor will probably advise you to:

- Be smoke-free
- Reduce your salt intake
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- Limit your alcohol intake to no more than two drinks per day, or one drink per day for women with high blood pressure
- Undertake regular physical activity

Your pharmacist can provide advice and counselling on lifestyle changes to help lower blood pressure and also help you to better understand the medications you may be taking to manage hypertension.

You can get more detailed information about High blood pressure from pharmacies around Australia providing the Self Care health information.

Ring 1300 369 772 or log onto the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia website at www.psa.org.au and click on Self Care then ‘Use the Self Care Pharmacy Finder’ for the location of your nearest Self Care pharmacy.