



THE PENTLANDS MEDICAL CENTRE

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Blood Pressure

High Blood pressure does not make people feel unwell. However if left untreated it tends to cause damage to the blood vessels and the heart, which may lead to heart or kidney failure and an increased risk of suffering from a heart attack or stroke. The purpose of treatment, which lowers the blood pressure, is to prevent this damage occurring and so help to prevent these illnesses. Treatment will not make you 'feel better' but you should stay healthier for longer and ideally you will feel no different when taking the treatment.

Is there any way of reducing blood pressure?

There are several things you can do to lower your blood pressure. If your blood pressure is marginally raised this may prevent the need to take tablets. However in most, cases you will still need to take tablets but you may be able to take less because you have helped to reduce your own blood pressure.

- **Avoid being overweight.** Try to keep your weight to a healthy level. Being overweight can increase your blood pressure.
- **Keep alcohol levels down.** Do not drink more than 21 units per week. (One unit is a glass of wine, a half-pint of beer or a single measure of alcohol). Try to drink the units evenly over the week and avoid a big drinking session and the resulting hangover!

- **Reduce salt intake.**
- **Exercise regularly.** It reduces blood pressure, helps to keep weight down and is a good stress reliever!
- **Quit smoking.** Giving up smoking does not lower blood pressure, but it greatly reduces the risk of blood pressure damage.

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Cholesterol

Should I have my cholesterol level checked?

In certain situations it is useful to know your cholesterol level to get a better idea of your health risk, and if necessary, to plan treatment to reduce your health risk. So, a cholesterol blood test is commonly advised if:

- you have other significant risk factors, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. A high blood cholesterol would add to your existing risk.
- you already have angina, had a heart attack, had a stroke or TIA, have peripheral vascular disease or have another atheroma related condition.
- a very high cholesterol level runs in the family (family hypercholesterolaemia)

The blood test is not usually advised if you are healthy, and your other risk factors are low.

What is a 'high' cholesterol level?

As a rule the higher the cholesterol level, the greater the risk to health. As a guide, a level less than 5 mmol/l is considered 'good', and is often the target advised to aim for. However, at least half of adults in the UK have a cholesterol level above 5mmol/l. An acceptable cholesterol level depends on whether you have other risk factors. For example:

- if you have a raised cholesterol, and you smoke, and you have a family history of early heart disease, then you have quite an increased risk of developing heart disease in the future.
- But, the increased health risk is small if you have no other risk factors apart from a raised cholesterol.

A 'risk factor calculator' is used by doctors and nurses to predict the health risk for an individual. The calculated score takes into account all your risk factors. Current guidelines advise that you should lower your cholesterol level if your score gives