

blood pressure & diabetes

Research has shown that good management of blood pressure is extremely important in decreasing the risk of stroke, heart disease, kidney disease, eye disease and nerve damage in people with diabetes.

Understanding blood pressure

- Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood in the arteries as the heart pumps it around the body. As diabetes and high blood pressure are often found together, your blood pressure should be checked each time you visit your doctor.
- When your blood pressure is taken it is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg) using a sphygmomanometer. The reading is recorded as two numbers for example, 130 / 80 stated as '130 over 80'.
- The top (larger number) records the pressure of the artery as the heart pushes out blood during each beat.
- The bottom (smaller number) records the pressure in the artery as the heart relaxes between beats.
- Blood pressure is best taken when you are relaxed and either sitting or lying down. Avoid eating, smoking or exercising for at least 30 minutes before having your blood pressure checked.
- Home blood pressure monitors are available through your State or Territory Diabetes Organisation and some pharmacies. However, it's best to talk to your doctor or educator first if you are thinking of buying one. Currently, wrist monitors are not generally recommended.
- For the most accurate reading using a home blood pressure monitor, make sure you follow the manufacturers' directions exactly. Relax, sit with your feet flat on the floor and rest your arm on a table at the level of your heart as you take the measurement.

As a guide, current target levels for people with diabetes are:

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- > Less than or equal to 130/80 in uncomplicated diabetes
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- > Less than 125 / 75 in people with proteinuria (kidney disease)
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What causes high blood pressure?

Some of the causes of high blood pressure are not known although it is known that it tends to run in families. Your lifestyle can also play a role such as being inactive, overweight, smoking, drinking a lot of alcohol and eating a lot of salt.

In some cases there is a cause for high blood pressure that needs treatment. A relatively common cause is kidney damage which itself is made worse by having high blood pressure. Research shows it is very important to control blood pressure to reduce further kidney damage.

How can I reduce my blood pressure?

There are six positive steps you can take to reduce your blood pressure:

- > Don't smoke. > Lose excess weight.
- > Do regular physical activity (30 minutes each day on most days of the week).
- > Take an eating plan rich in fruit, vegetables and grains. Include lean meat, poultry, fish and low fat dairy products.
- > Have less salt by limiting processed and takeaway foods and not adding salt in cooking afterwards.
- > Limit alcohol to 2 standard drinks per day for men and 1 standard drink per day for women*. A standard drink is equivalent to 285mL regular beer, 425mL low alcohol beer, 100mL wine, 60mL fortified wine or 30mL spirits. Drink with a meal or snack containing carbohydrate and try to include alcohol-free days each week.

* NHMRC, Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults (2003).

While tablets may be necessary to help reduce blood pressure, they are in addition to and not a substitute for a healthy eating plan and regular physical activity. It is not unusual to need 3 to 4 medications to control blood pressure.

How often should I get my blood pressure checked?

Your blood pressure should be checked at every doctor's visit, at least 6 monthly for people with normal blood pressure and 3 monthly for people with high blood pressure. If your blood pressure medication is being changed, blood pressure needs to be measured every 4-8 weeks.

The design, content and production of this diabetes information sheet has been undertaken by the eight State and Territory member organisations of Diabetes Australia Ltd listed below:

- > Diabetes Australia - New South Wales > Diabetes Australia - Victoria
- > Diabetes Australia - Queensland > Diabetes Australia - Tasmania
- > Diabetes ACT > Diabetes SA > Diabetes WA > Healthy Living NT

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