



## HYPERTENSION PATIENT LEAFLET



### **Q: What is hypertension?**

Hypertension is high pressure of blood in your arteries. It is recorded as two numbers, eg. 120/80. The top number (systolic) is the pressure in the arteries when the heart contracts. The bottom number (diastolic) is the pressure in the arteries when the heart rests between each heartbeat. **High blood pressure** is a reading that is **150/90 mmHg** or above.

### **Q. What causes hypertension?**

In most cases, the cause is **unknown**. This is referred to as 'essential hypertension'. In some cases, high blood pressure is caused by **other conditions**. This is called 'secondary hypertension'.

### **Q. What is my target blood pressure?**

Blood pressure depends on several factors. For most people, the target is to have a blood pressure of less than 150/90.

### **Q: How common is hypertension?**

In the UK, about **half of people over 65**, and about 1 in 4 middle aged adults have high blood pressure. It is more common in people:

- -with diabetes
- -from African-Caribbean origin
- -from the Indian sub-continent
- -with a family history of high blood pressure
- -with certain lifestyle factors: eg. those who are overweight, eat high-salt diets, eat minimal fruit and vegetables, do not take much exercise, drink a lot of coffee, have a high alcohol intake and smoke cigarettes

### **Q: But I feel fine – am I really at risk?**

High blood pressure itself has **no symptoms**. It is however a strong risk factor for developing a cardiovascular disease (such as a heart attack or stroke), eye and kidney damage.

In general, the higher your blood pressure, the greater the health risk. But, high blood pressure is just one of several possible risk factors for developing a cardiovascular disease. Others include smoking, alcohol, high cholesterol, diabetes, age, male gender, strong family history, sedentary lifestyle, ethnic origin, obesity, amongst others.

**The benefit of lowering a high blood pressure is to reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease in the future.**

### **Q. What can I expect at the practice?**

You may be started on a **tablet(s)** that will help to lower your blood pressure. It is important to have regular blood pressure measurements and follow-up appointments to ensure your tablets are at the optimal dose for you. You must continue to take this medication unless your GP advises you to stop

Several tests may be done to look for the cause of your high blood pressure, its potential effects and risk factors for cardiovascular disease. For example:

1) At time of **diagnosis** you may have had:

**A urine test:** to make sure your kidneys are functioning normally.

**A heart tracing/ECG:** To ensure your heart is not being strained due to the high pressure

2) You will be invited for an **annual review** with the specialist nurse. You may be asked to have:

**A blood test:** to check your cholesterol level, your blood sugar level (for diabetes), and your kidney function. You do not have to be fasted for this test.

You may also be weighed and asked about your smoking status, etc. General advice on lifestyle choices may be given. Feel free to ask any questions you may have.

### **Q.What can I do?**

The main ways in which blood pressure can be lowered include:

- Modifications to lifestyle** where required, eg: weight loss, stop smoking, exercise, eating a healthy diet, lowering salt and caffeine, limiting alcohol intake
- Regularly taking prescribed **medication**

**Your chemist offers a smoking cessation program if you are interested/ready to stop**

### **Q. What things should I look out for?**

Please make an appointment with the practice if you experience any of the following:

- -persistent headaches
- -visual changes
- -heart palpitations
- -chest pain
- -dizziness
- -nausea/vomiting
- -ringing in ears
- -any changes after starting your tablets

Or seek immediate help if you experience:

- -crushing chest pain, feel sweaty, look pale
- -numbness or weakness
- -speech disturbances

### **Q. Where can I find more information?**

Feel free to ask your GP or nurse if you have any questions.

There are also a number of helpful websites online:

[http://www.patient.co.uk/health/High-Blood-Pressure-\(Hypertension\).htm](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/High-Blood-Pressure-(Hypertension).htm)

[http://www.cks.nhs.uk/patient\\_information\\_leaflet/blood\\_pressure\\_high#](http://www.cks.nhs.uk/patient_information_leaflet/blood_pressure_high#)

<http://www.bpassoc.org.uk/BloodPressureandyou/Yourbody>

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/bp/bp.htm>



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