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## Nutrition and Hypertension

By Dietitian Caitlin Dillon-Smith



High blood pressure, or hypertension, remains the leading risk factor for heart disease. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to a heart attack, stroke or kidney disease.

In Australia, about 1 in 3 people aged 18 and over (34%) have high blood pressure.

### What is hypertension?

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is when the force of the blood pushing on the blood vessel walls is too high.

When someone has high blood pressure:

- The heart has to pump harder.
- The arteries are under greater strain as they carry blood

### Risk factors for high blood pressure:

- Poor diet
- Obesity
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Insufficient physical activity

### Symptoms of hypertension

Hypertension is called a "silent killer".

Most people with hypertension are unaware of the problem because it may have no warning signs or symptoms. For this reason, it is important to have a health professional measure your blood pressure regularly.

When symptoms do occur, they can include early morning headaches, nosebleeds, irregular heart rhythms, vision changes & buzzing in the ears.

Severe hypertension can cause fatigue, nausea, vomiting, confusion, anxiety, chest pain, and muscle tremors.

## What can we do about it?

High blood pressure can be controlled with lifestyle measures & medication, reducing the risk of developing chronic conditions. Although drugs that lower blood pressure work well, they don't attack the cause of the problem & can have unwanted side effects.

A healthy diet is an effective first-line defence for preventing high blood pressure. It is a positive initial treatment when blood pressure rises into the unhealthy zone, and a good partner for medications.



### 6 Lifestyle tips to help prevent high blood pressure

1. Reduce salt intake: Reducing salt intake to less than 5 grams per day can result in a decline in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure.
2. Reduce fat intake: Reducing saturated and total fat intake and incorporating healthy fats in moderation. Avoid animal fat, stick margarine, vegetable shortenings and commercial bakery and deep-fried foods.
3. Weight management: Maintain a healthy body weight. Lose weight if you are overweight.
4. Healthy eating: Eat at least 5 serves vegetables and 2 serves of fruit every day. Eat low-fat dairy products and whole grains, while reducing the amount of sweets and sugar-containing beverages.
5. Physical activity: Aim to be physically active on a regular basis.
6. Stress management: Stress may temporarily increase blood pressure. Find some healthy ways to cope with stress that are effective for you.



## 8 Healthy diet ideas to help control blood pressure

1. Eat more fish, nuts and legumes.
2. Turn to vegetables and fruits instead of sugary or salty snacks and desserts.
3. Select breads, pasta, and other carbohydrate-rich foods that are made from whole grains instead of highly refined white flour.
4. Reduce alcohol consumption and consumption of high sugar beverages (drinking water is best).
5. Eat fruit instead of drinking fruit juice.
6. Use unsaturated fats like olive, canola, soybean, peanut, corn, or safflower oils instead of butter, coconut oil, or palm-kernel oil.
7. Rely on fresh or frozen foods instead of canned and processed foods.
8. Choose low-sodium foods whenever possible; use herbs, spices, vinegar, and other low-sodium flavourings instead of salt.



For great healthy recipe ideas, please visit: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/recipes>

*Supporting Heart Research Australia's "Red Feb" campaign powers their researchers to explore new medical breakthroughs in heart disease.*



Need help with making healthy lifestyle choices for those in your care?

This article was written by Dietitian, Caitlin Dillon-Smith.

Please call or email **OSCAR** Care Group Dietitians via our contact details below.

### References:

Heart Foundation Fact Sheet

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World Health Organisation: Hypertension

[www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu)



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