**Lifestyle treatments to lower high blood pressure**

**Lose weight if you are overweight**

Losing some excess weight can make a big difference. Blood pressure can fall by up to 2.5/1/5mmHg for each excess kilogram which is lost. Losing excess weight has other health benefits too.

**Regular physical activity**

If possible, aim to do some physical activity on five or more days of the week, for at least 30 minutes. For example, brisk walking, swimming, cycling, dancing etc. Regular physical activity can lower blood pressure for addition to giving other health benefits. If you previously did little physical activity and change to doing regular physical activity five times a week, it can reduce systolic blood pressure by 2-10 mmHg.

**Eat a healthy diet**

Briefly, this means:

* AT LEAST five portions and ideally 7-9 portions, of a variety of fruit and vegetables per day.
* THE BULK OF MOST MEALS should be starch-based foods (such as cereals, wholegrain bread, potatoes, rice, pasta) plus fruit and vegetables.
* NOT MUCH fatty food such as fatty meats, cheeses, full-cream milk, friend food, butter, etc. Use low-fat, mono-unsaturated or polyunsaturated spreads.
* INCLUDE 2-3 portions of fish per week. At least one of which should be ‘oily’ such as herring, mackerel, sardines, kippers, pilchard, salmon or fresh (not tinned) tuna.
* If you eat meat it is best to EAT LEAN MEAT or eat poultry such as chicken.
* If you do fry, choose a VEGETABLE OIL such as sunflower, rapeseed or olive.
* LIMIT SALT in your diet (see below).

A healthy diet provides benefits in different ways. For example, it can lower cholesterol, help control your weight and has plenty of vitamins, fibre and other nutrients which help to prevent certain diseases. Some aspects of a healthy diet also directly affect blood pressure. For example, if you have a poor diet and change to a diet which is low-fat, low-salt and high in fruit and vegetables, it can lower systolic blood pressure by up to 11 mmHg.

**Have a low salt intake**

The amount of salt that we eat can have an effect on our blood pressure. Government guidelines recommend that we should have no more than 5-6 grams of salt per day. (Most people currently have more than this.) Tips on how to reduce sale include:

* Use herbs and spices rather than salt to flavour food.
* Limit the amount of salt used in cooking and do not add salt to food at the table.
* Choose food labelled ‘no added salt’ and avoid processed foods as much as possible.

**Restrict your number of caffeine drinks**

Caffeine is thought to have a modest effect on blood pressure. It is advised that you restrict your coffee consumption (and other caffeine-rich drinks) to fewer than five cups per day.

**Drink alcohol in moderation**

A small amount of alcohol (1-2 units per day) may help to protect you from heart disease. One unit is in about half a pint of normal strength beer or two thirds of a small glass of wine or one small pub measure of spirits. However, too much alcohol can be harmful.

* Men should drink no more than 21 units of alcohol per week (and no more than four units in any one day)
* Woman should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week (and no more than four units in any one day).

Cutting back on heavy drinking improves health in various ways. It can also have a direct effect on blood pressure. For example, if you are drinking heavily, cutting back to the recommended limits can lower a high systolic blood pressure by up to 10 mmHg.

**Lifestyle – in summary**

It is estimated that dietary and exercise interventions discussed above can reduce blood pressure by at least 10 mmHg in about 1 in 4 people with high blood pressure.