



## What does Hypertension or High Blood Pressure mean?

We all have blood pressure. It is basically a measurement of the amount of work your heart has to do to pump blood around your body. Everyone's blood pressure rises and falls during the day, but when it stays high all the time that means that person has high blood pressure or Hypertension (HTN). The normal level of blood pressure is 120/80.

High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes the heart work too hard and the high force of blood damages the arteries and organs including heart, kidneys, brain and eyes. Most people with high blood pressure feel and look well, and don't even realise they have a problem. People with uncontrolled high blood pressure can have a heart attack or stroke much earlier than people with normal blood pressure. That's why it is advisable for people over 30 years to have it checked by their GP or Practice Nurse at least every 5 years if normal but more often if your blood pressure is borderline or high.

## What causes High Blood Pressure?

We know that there are a number of factors that can contribute to high blood pressure. These include:

- Being overweight or obese
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Eating too much sodium (salt)
- Not eating enough fruit and vegetables
- Ethnicity
- Stress
- Family History

## Salt and High Blood Pressure

Salt has been proven to increase blood pressure. More than two thirds of the salt we eat every day comes from processed foods and foods prepared outside the home. The remainder comes from salt



used in cooking or at the table. Only 5% occurs naturally in food. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that adults should not exceed 6g/day, but if everyone in Ireland reduced their salt intake by half a teaspoon a day (3g), it would prevent around 900 deaths each year from stroke and heart attacks.

The following is a list of simple things to do at home to help you and your family to reduce your salt intake:

- Only add a small amount of salt during cooking or at the table.
- Try other ways to add flavour to food eg. pepper, herbs, spices, garlic, vinegar etc.
- Don't use stock cubes, gravy granules, ready-made sauces and packets/tinned soups frequently. Try making homemade versions of these instead.
- Opt for fresh vegetables and fresh meat, poultry and fish more often than tinned or processed types.
- Make home-made meals more often but if using ready meals, opt for low salt versions and add extra fresh vegetables.
- Read food labels. Products usually refer to sodium rather than salt. To convert sodium into salt, multiply the sodium figure by 2.5. For example if a product has 0.5g sodium, that means that product has 2.5g salt. Foods with >1.3g salt per 100g or >0.5g sodium per 100g are high in salt.
- Remember children need less salt than adults.

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