

Six Simple Steps to lower your blood pressure



High blood pressure (hypertension) can quietly harm your heart, brain and kidneys – but you have the power to turn the tide. The great news? Simple, everyday food choices can make a big difference.

===== Quick Wins =====

- Eat a banana, avocado or jacket potato daily** - potassium rich food like these helps relax blood vessels

- Put milled flax seeds on your breakfast** - just two tablespoons daily can lower your blood pressure

- Add beans or lentils to 3-4 meals per week** - swap red meat for these protein and fibre powerhouses

- Have a handful of unsalted nuts daily** - instead of crisps or salted nuts try walnuts, almonds or brazils

- Try beetroot 3-4 times weekly** - add to salads, roast it or try beetroot juice

- Flavour food with herbs and spices** - cut back the salt and try basil, oregano, cinnamon, turmeric or garlic to support healthy blood pressure

WARNING: THESE QUICK WINS ARE MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN SALT, SUGAR, ALCOHOL, READY MEALS AND TAKE-AWAYS ARE KEPT TO A MINIMUM!

Modern medicine is amazing. It has the power to save lives, change lives and make us feel more alive. But when it comes to chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, medicine often just tackles the symptoms without curing the disease. This is where food comes in. Making changes to what you eat (and how much you move) can address the root cause of many long-term health problems leading to a reduction in symptoms or even a reversal of the disease.

Change can be challenging - especially the big changes needed for big gains. For most of us it's easier to make lots of small changes, one at a time. Working through these tips and ideas will help new, healthy habits to get 'baked in' and become more likely to last - giving you better health today and for the rest of your life.

This guide allows you take small steps towards bringing your blood pressure down naturally, sometimes in just a few weeks. You don't need fancy supplements or extreme diets – just real, whole foods and a few smart swaps.

Every healthy choice you make is like a small gift to your future self.

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You don't need to go vegetarian but try to fill at least half of your plate with colour - fruit, veg, beans, nuts or seeds.

1.

PLANT POWER

Plants are nature's pharmacy, producing compounds that act like medicines, helping to reduce blood pressure. Low in sodium and high in potassium, magnesium and fibre - whole plant foods are the perfect combination for keeping blood pressure down.

Potassium powerhouses (have at least one daily):

- A banana - easiest grab-and-go option
- A jacket potato or sweet potato (with skin on - serve with beans and greens!)
- A handful of dried apricots
- An avocado on wholemeal toast

Beetroot and leafy greens (3-4 times weekly) are super foods for blood pressure - rich in nitrates, which help blood vessels relax and increase blood flow - just like some medications.

- Add sliced beetroot to salads or sandwiches - fresh and vacuum packed are best - check pickled beetroot for hidden salt!
- Roast beetroot with your Sunday dinner
- Try a small glass of beetroot juice - it can reduce blood pressure within hours!
- Stir frozen spinach into pasta, curry or soup
- Add kale or spring greens to stir-fries
- Add rocket, spinach, or lettuce to every salad

TOP TIP - Eat the rainbow: Try and eat as many different bright coloured fruits and vegetables as possible. **Try a different colour each day!**

Make it easy:

- Sprinkle berries onto your breakfast or use frozen ones for overnight oats
- Aim to fill at least half of your plate with vegetables for lunch and dinner - think of the meat and carbs more like a topping / garnish
- Frozen and tinned are cheap, convenient and just as good for you
- Make your own coleslaw with grated cabbage, carrot and onion - add spices, herbs and any other fruit & veg for extra flavour

GO FOR GOLD: Five a day is a good start - aim for 6, 7, or even 10 portions per day! The more you can eat, the better your health.

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2.

REDUCE YOUR SALT

Salt (sodium) is one of the main drivers of high blood pressure in the UK diet. Reducing salt by just 1g a day can significantly cut the risk of stroke and heart attack.

Simple Swaps:

- Crisps or salted nuts ➡ Unsalted nuts or fruit (especially berries or apricots)
- Ready meals or take-always ➡ Home-cooked meals (you control the salt)
- Processed meats (bacon, ham, sausages) ➡ Fresh chicken, fish, or beans
- Tinned soups ➡ Homemade soup with no added salt

At the table and in cooking:

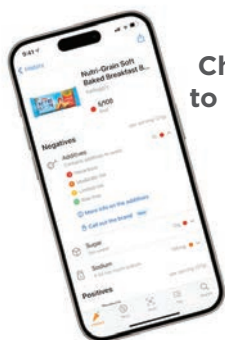
- Remove the salt shaker from your table
- Use half the salt you normally add when cooking
- Taste food before reaching for salt
- Season with black pepper, chilli, lemon juice, garlic or olive oil instead
- Use fresh or dried herbs - basil, oregano, parsley, coriander
- Try spices to season - cinnamon, ginger, turmeric, cardamom and cumin can all help lower blood pressure

Make it easy:

- Each week swap one more takeaway or ready meal for a home-cooked meal
- Keep a bowl of unsalted nuts and fruit visible for snacking
- Buy low sodium salt

HIDDEN SALT ALERT!

Check labels or use the Yuka app to check for hidden salt that lurks in bread, cereals, sauces, and most processed foods.



TOP TIP - Just two tablespoons of milled flaxseeds on your daily porridge can lower blood pressure



3.

BE FULL OF BEANS!

Beans, lentils, nuts and seeds are super foods - after all they contain all the goodness needed to grow another whole plant. They are low in sodium and high in potassium, magnesium and fibre with healthy fats and plant compounds that support healthy blood pressure.

Beans and lentils (3-4 times weekly):

- Swap red meat for beans in bolognese, curry, soup or stews
- Try beans on a baked sweet potato - look out for hidden salt or sugar!
- Hummus is a double win made of beans *and* seeds - try with veg sticks or as a sandwich spread
- Try a simple, cheap and delicious bean salad for lunch instead of a sandwich
- Dried red lentils are one of the cheapest proteins available - throw a handful into your soup or curry whilst it cooks

Nuts & seeds (a small handful/30g daily):

- Snack on unsalted walnuts, brazils, cashews or almonds - keep a pot of nuts with you at work, in your bag or in the car
- A bulk bag is much cheaper - portion into small containers for the week
- Add chia, sesame, sunflower, flax or pumpkin seeds to yogurts, cereals, salads or soups

Make it easy:

- Start with beans on wholemeal toast - the easiest swap
- Tinned beans are very convenient and affordable. Try a different variety each time you shop - baked beans, kidney beans, chickpeas butter beans, black beans.
- Try using butter beans instead of pasta or potatoes in some recipes
- Toast a mixture of nuts and seeds - cool and store in a jar next to your breakfast cereals

Reducing salt by just 1g a day can cut the risk of stroke and heart attack.

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4.

GO FOR WHOLEGRAINS

Whole grains are rich in fibre, magnesium, and potassium - all support healthy blood pressure. They also help you feel fuller for longer.

Simple swaps:

- White bread ➡ Wholemeal or granary bread
- White rice ➡ Brown rice - try red or black rice for extra goodness
- White pasta ➡ Wholemeal pasta
- Sugary cereals/cornflakes ➡ Porridge oats or bran flakes - try adding nuts, seeds and fruit
- Pastries and cakes ➡ Oat cakes with hummus or wholemeal toast with peanut butter

Make it easy:

- Start with just ONE swap this week (bread is usually easiest)
- Buy wholegrain versions when you next shop
- Cook brown rice for slightly longer than white
- Start by mixing half white/half brown if the taste takes getting used to



Just one banana a day is a simple and affordable habit to help lower blood pressure - especially when swapped for a high salt or sugary snack

MOVEMENT IS MEDICINE

Eating a healthy, plant-rich diet makes an enormous difference to your health. When you add movement into the mix, the effect is even stronger. Even small amounts of exercise will tell your body to release chemicals that can lower blood pressure and protect you from chronic illness. Good food and regular movement are powerful ways to influence both how well you live and how long you live.

Beetroot juice can lower blood pressure within hours - alcohol can raise it within minutes!

5.

DRINK MORE - OF THE RIGHT STUFF!

Green tea and hibiscus tea contain beneficial plant compounds that help reduce blood pressure. Energy drinks and excessive alcohol will increase blood pressure. Even small amounts of alcohol can raise blood pressure over time, so cutting back has an immediate effect.

Simple swaps:

- Regular tea/coffee ➡ Green tea or hibiscus tea (2-3 cups daily)
- Energy drinks ➡ Water or herbal tea (energy drinks increase blood pressure but don't give you energy!!)
- Sugary drinks ➡ Water with lemon or lime

Alcohol: The safest option for high blood pressure is to not drink at all. Maximum 14 units per week if you do drink (about 6 pints of beer or 7 glasses of wine)

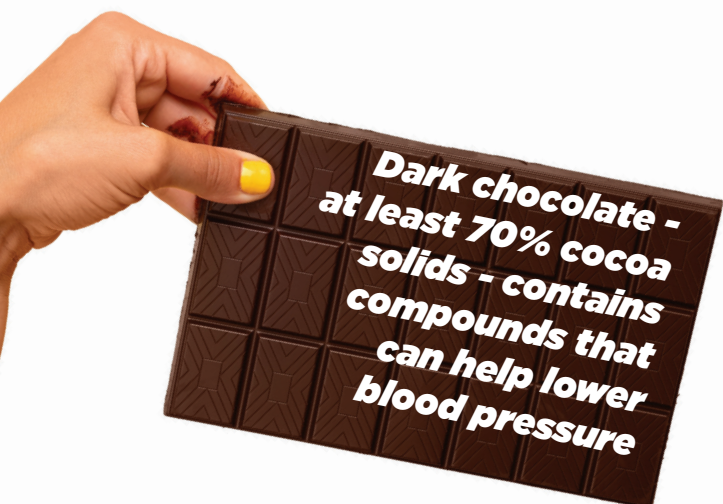
- Beer or cider ➡ Alcohol-free beer or cider
- Wine with dinner ➡ Sparkling water with lime
- Evening drink ➡ Herbal tea or hibiscus tea

TOP TIP - Buddy with a friend or family member - cutting down is much easier with support

Make it easy:

- Try hibiscus or green tea as your daily cuppa
- Pick 3 alcohol-free days per week
- Use a smaller glass when you do drink alcohol
- Keep alcohol-free alternatives in the fridge

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YOUR SUCCESS TIPS

Start small: Master one step before moving to the next. Even one change makes a difference!

Make it visible: Print this out and stick it on your fridge as a daily reminder.

Tell someone: Share your plan with family or a friend. Support helps!

Slip-ups are normal: Missed a day? No worries. Just start again tomorrow. It's about progress, not perfection.

Be patient: Blood pressure changes take a few weeks to show. Stick with it!

Celebrate wins: Managed all 6 steps for a week? That's fantastic - treat yourself (but maybe not to a high salt or sugary snack!)

6.

SMART SNACKING

These swaps help you avoid refined carbs, unhealthy fats and excess sugar - all of which can contribute to higher blood pressure.

Simple swaps:

- Crisps or salty snacks ➡ Unsalted nuts, hummus and veg sticks, fruit
- Milk chocolate ➡ Dark chocolate (70%+ cocoa - its more expensive but you only need a couple of small squares
- Sweets and candy ➡ A handful of berries or some dried apricots
- Biscuits ➡ Oat cakes with nut butter
- Ice cream ➡ Frozen berries with Greek yogurt

Be prepared:

Always carry your own snacks with you - nuts, dried fruit (especially apricots), whole fruit (don't forget bananas), Veg sticks or oat biscuits. This way you are less likely to be tempted into fried foods, processed meat and sugary snacks that all raise blood pressure.

Make it easy:

- Keep a bar of 70%+ dark chocolate handy for healthy snacking or after dinner sweet cravings
- Keep bowls of fruit and nuts visible around the house to snack on
- Don't keep unhealthy snacks at home such as biscuits, sweets and crisps. If you cant reach them - you cant eat them.



Remember: Your blood pressure responds to every positive change - even small steps, made daily, can have big benefits: Start today, keep going, and your heart will thank you.

"It's not all or nothing. It's all or something."

For further advice and support visit:
pioneermedicalgroup.nhs.uk/patient-support-and-information/self-care/nutrition