

LOVE YOUR



LOWER YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

**EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
BLOOD PRESSURE AND HEART HEALTH**



IRISH
HEART
FOUNDATION

INSIDE

Know your numbers

Healthy eating to prevent
high blood pressure

Medication and
high blood pressure

**COLETTE
KIELY**
LIVING WITH HIGH
BLOOD PRESSURE
AND DIABETES



**BEN
DUNNE**

“YOUR HEALTH IS
YOUR WEALTH.”



TWINK JUGGLING
A BUSY CAREER WITH
A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE



**THE
FIRST
STEP**
Know your
Blood Pressure

Supported by the



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



**IRISH
HEART
FOUNDATION**

4 Clyde Road, Ballsbridge
Dublin 4

Phone +353 01 668 5001
Fax +353 01 668 5896

Email info@irishheart.ie
www.irishheart.ie
Patient Helpline: 1890432787



WE CARE ABOUT YOU

At the Irish Heart Foundation, we listen, advise, research and educate, so you can live a longer, healthier life. We are the only national charity working to prevent and reduce death and disability from heart disease and stroke in people under 65.

Our charity is 90 per cent funded by public donations, which means we rely on the goodwill and generosity of the public and the corporate sector to make our work possible.

-  national patient helpline
-  support groups
-  research programmes
-  promote CPR training
-  website
-  health programmes in schools, workplaces and communities
-  information literature
-  advocating better patient services

JOIN US

If you have time to spare, call us now to become a volunteer with heart on 01 668 5001 or make a donation on www.irishheart.ie. Join us and make a difference today. We thank you for your support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Irish Heart Foundation would like to thank all those who gave of their time for interview and shared their personal experiences for this publication: Adele King (Twink), Ben Dunne and Colette Kiely.

The Foundation would like to thank Prof. Alice Stanton, Chairperson of the Irish Heart Foundation's Council on Blood Pressure and all members of the Council for their input and support.

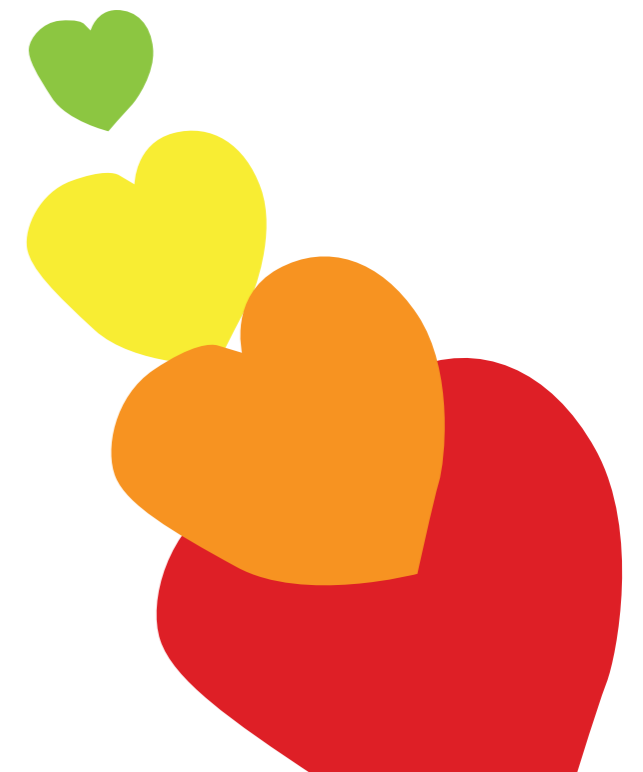
The Health Service Executive provides funding and support for Irish Heart Week and the publication of this resource. The magazine is published by Health Promotion, Irish Heart Foundation.

September 2008

LOVE YOUR LOWER YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

4	Introduction	16	Healthy eating to prevent high blood pressure
4	Five key messages	18	Lower your blood pressure... get more active
5	Know your blood pressure	20	Living with high blood pressure and diabetes Interview with Colette Kiely
5	Know your numbers	22	Cholesterol
6	Why does blood pressure rise?	23	Smoking and stress
7	Signs and symptoms	24	Heart attack and stroke
7	Check up with the doctor	27	Useful contacts
8	Your health is your wealth Interview with Ben Dunne		
10	Managing high blood pressure with medication		
12	Juggling a busy career with a healthy lifestyle Interview with Twink		
14	Healthy eating for everyone		

CONTENTS





PROF. EOIN O'BRIEN

President
Irish Heart Foundation

“High blood pressure, which often begins in middle age or earlier affects over half the population over the age of 60 years. It is the major cause of stroke and heart attack, which afflicts about 30,000 Irish people annually. If you control your blood pressure and follow a healthy lifestyle, you can prevent your chances of getting a stroke and heart attack. However, in Ireland only 30 per cent of people with high blood pressure have normal blood pressure in spite of taking drugs. So to prevent stroke we should all know our blood pressure and if it is high we should make sure that it is brought down to normal as soon as possible. The lower your blood pressure the better and the better the chance of preventing stroke and heart attack.”

Prof Eoin O'Brien, President, Irish Heart Foundation .

KNOW YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE



Blood. It is as important to life as fresh air. In fact it is blood that transports the oxygen we inhale around our body through the blood vessels (arteries and veins). Blood pressure is the measurement of the force of the blood on the walls of the artery. While it's normal for blood pressure to rise and fall during each day, when it stays abnormally high for some months or longer, it is called high blood pressure. High blood pressure, together with other factors, can cause the blood vessels to lose their elasticity and encourage the build up of fatty deposits. This in turn can cause narrowing and blockage of the arteries leading to heart attacks, stroke and kidney damage. “Diseases of the blood vessels affect the transport system of the body. If you don't have an adequate blood supply, the heart, brain and kidneys will suffer,” explains Professor Alice Stanton, chairperson of the Irish Heart Foundation's Blood Pressure Council.

The multiplier effect

The major risk factors for heart disease are:

- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- inactivity
- smoking
- diabetes



PROF. ALICE STANTON

Chair, Irish Heart Foundation's
Council on Blood Pressure

“High blood pressure on its own may not always lead to heart disease. If you have more than one risk factor, it's not a question of adding the risk factors, they have a multiplier effect which is much more serious. As doctors we pay much more attention if a patient has more than one risk factor and therefore manage the problem more aggressively,” says Professor Alice Stanton. High blood pressure is not something to be feared or dreaded. It is not a disease. It is a risk factor which can be treated and help prevent disease. High blood pressure is extremely common. A recent survey showed that 60% or 3 out of 5 Irish men and women aged over 45 years have high blood pressure. Only one quarter have their blood pressure managed within a healthy level i.e. below 140 over 90 (140/90).

LOVE YOUR LOWER YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

- 1 Know your numbers. Ask your family doctor or practice nurse to check your blood pressure.
- 2 Eat more fruit and vegetables. Eat less salt and processed foods. If you drink alcohol, keep within recommended limits.
- 3 Be more physically active every day.
- 4 Aim to be a healthy weight for your height.
- 5 If you are prescribed tablets to lower your blood pressure, continue to take them as directed.

Know your numbers

The heart is in a non-stop process of pumping, relaxing, then pumping again. When the heart pumps, it contracts, the blood enters the blood vessels at a pressure (called systolic pressure) and when the heart relaxes the pressure falls (called diastolic pressure). Blood pressure is measured in millimetres (mm) of mercury (Hg).

A normal level of blood pressure is usually described as 120 systolic over 80 diastolic, or 120/80, but this can vary with activity.

A 'high normal' blood pressure is 130 to 140 over 85 to 90, while anything above 140 over 90 needs medical attention and intervention. When someone is diagnosed with diabetes, doctors will take action earlier if blood pressure is higher than 130 over 85.

120
80

Why does blood pressure rise?

There is usually more than one cause. The main factors approximately in order of importance, which influence blood pressure are:

your age - as you age, blood vessels lose their elasticity and therefore do not do their job as well. As a result, risk factors, arising from an unhealthy lifestyle, have a greater effect and high blood pressure develops much faster.

your family history - if members of your family have high blood pressure, you have a higher risk of getting it too, which is linked to your genes.

your diet - an unbalanced diet high in salt and low in fruit and vegetables can lead to high blood pressure. Foods high in salt retain water, creating too much fluid in the body. Following the Food Pyramid guidelines will help to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.

if you are overweight - blood pressure is closely linked to body weight. Too many calories will increase body weight and an increase in blood pressure usually follows. Even losing a small amount of excess weight, say 10%, can help lower blood pressure.

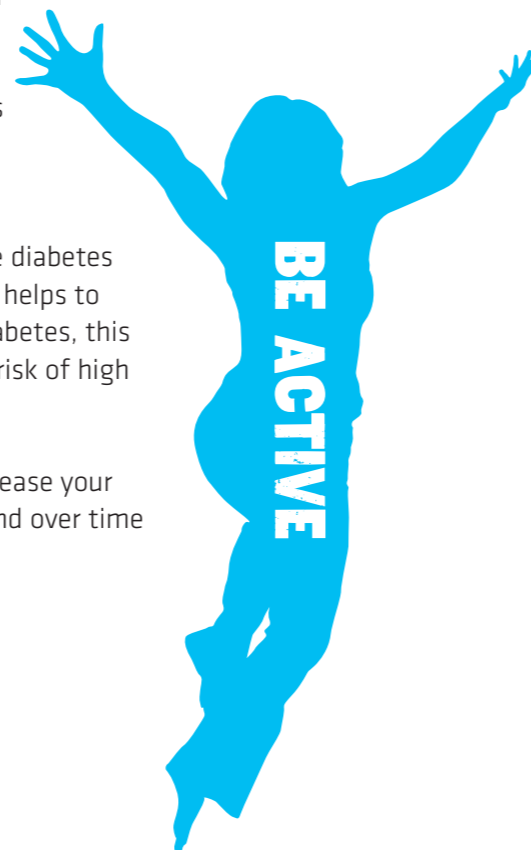
your levels of activity - Regular physical activity helps keep your weight at a healthy level and prevents weight gain. If you need to lose weight physical activity should be part of a weight-loss plan, thereby reducing your risk of raised blood pressure. Being physically active and taking regular exercise increases the size of the blood vessels, improves blood flow and helps keep your cholesterol at a healthy level.

if you drink alcohol to excess - binge drinking raises blood pressure levels. If you cut back to moderate drinking, it should help reduce your blood pressure (See page 16 for more information on alcohol). Also, alcoholic drinks are high in calories and may contribute to unwanted weight gain.

if you smoke - nicotine in tobacco smoke causes blood vessels to narrow and carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke can cause further damage.

if you have diabetes - people who do not have diabetes naturally produce nitric oxide, a small molecule that helps to keep blood pressure at normal levels. If you have diabetes, this molecule is not produced properly, which raises the risk of high blood pressure.

if you are stressed - long-term stress may increase your blood pressure as it may speed up your heart rate and over time damage your blood vessels.



Signs & Symptoms

“HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE DOES SILENT DAMAGE. IF YOU THINK THAT YOU CAN DECIDE YOURSELF THAT YOU HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE WITHOUT IT BEING MEASURED, YOU ARE COURTING DANGER.”

PROF. ALICE STANTON

It is not well known, but high blood pressure rarely causes any signs and symptoms until the damage starts to affect your health. “High blood pressure does silent damage. If you think that you can decide yourself that you have high blood pressure without it being measured, you are courting danger,” says Professor Alice Stanton.

“We want to get the message out that from age 30, blood pressure should be measured at least every five years. If your blood pressure is borderline (above normal levels), it should be checked more frequently and the best place is in the surgery by your GP or practice nurse.”

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT WHEN YOU VISIT THE DOCTOR?

It's a simple check, it takes only a moment or two and it could save your life. A doctor or nurse places an inflatable rubber cuff around the upper arm and this is attached to a pressure gauge.

The cuff is inflated and using a stethoscope s/he listens to the artery in your arm below the cuff as the air is released. When they can hear the blood pumping into the arteries, they record the blood pressure (systolic pressure) and when the blood flow becomes continuous, these sounds disappear, and they record the blood pressure as the heart relaxes (diastolic pressure). Many GP surgeries now use automatic machines, where again a cuff is placed around the upper arm, it is automatically inflated and the machine records your blood pressure.

If you are diagnosed with high blood pressure or identified as being at risk of the condition, the doctor is likely to recommend a range of lifestyle changes such as:

- > **Eating** a diet that is high in fruit, vegetables and unprocessed cereals (eg. porridge) as well as low in saturated (animal) fats.
- > **Eating** less salt and processed foods.
- > **Being** more physically active.
- > **Losing** weight and staying a healthy weight.
- > **Cutting** down on alcohol consumption.
- > **Stopping** smoking.

You will be asked to return in three months for a repeat check, when hopefully the changes you have made have lowered your blood pressure to normal levels. Although lifestyle changes can be very effective, some people will need medication as well.

If you are diagnosed with high blood pressure, you should be checked for cholesterol and diabetes, tests which can also be done simply and quickly in the GP surgery.

BEN DUNNE



“I FELT FANTASTIC AFTER MY CHECK-UP AND WAS DELIGHTED TO HEAR THAT I’M A HEALTHY SPECIMEN FOR MY AGE.”

Irish entrepreneur Ben Dunne looks at the big picture... his health. According to the well-known businessman, the bottom line is – your health is your wealth.

Irish entrepreneur Ben Dunne shares his new-found motivation to get healthy and fit. The straight-talking businessman, who ran Dunnes Stores until the early 1990’s, routinely takes medication for blood pressure and cholesterol every morning. But despite knowing the importance of keeping his blood pressure and cholesterol at normal levels, Mr Dunne admitted that healthy living has not been top of his agenda... until now.

As part of Irish Heart Week, the Irish Heart Foundation invited Ben Dunne to have a full cardiovascular check-up, during which he received a clean bill of health. Ben’s test results showed average day-time and night-time blood pressure levels of 137/70 and 113/58. Total cholesterol was 5.1 mmol/l, and importantly his level of LDL- or bad cholesterol was only 2.0 mmol/l. Delighted with the good report, the 59-year-old told us how it has given him new focus and motivation to make real changes to his lifestyle.

He said: “I felt fantastic after my check-up and was delighted to hear that I’m a healthy specimen for my age. Getting a good report like this has really given me a boost and made me realise how important it is to stay healthy.”

Mr Dunne continued: “I take four tablets when I wake up in the morning - it’s part of my routine. It’s not something I think about hugely because I understand that it’s part of life, that in order to keep my blood pressure healthy and avoid stroke, I can’t afford to miss taking my medication.”

“But I’m starting to realise that just taking my medication isn’t enough. I love life and I’d like to stay here – I don’t want to be gone from this world too early. So now I’m on a mission to lose a bit of weight and really revamp my diet and start getting a bit fitter.”

“I DON’T WANT TO BE GONE FROM THIS WORLD TOO EARLY. SO NOW I’M ON A MISSION TO LOSE A BIT OF WEIGHT AND REALLY REVAMP MY DIET AND START GETTING A BIT FITTER.”



Ben told us how he never used to eat breakfast and aside from the odd game of golf, physical activity didn’t feature hugely on his agenda. But now the man who always has an eye for new opportunities is determined not to miss out on the opportunity to live a longer, healthier life.

The enterprising fitness centre king said: “I was very happy with my results and already I’m making big changes. It’s a bit like getting a good exam result – it gives you the drive to study harder. I used to skip breakfast in the mornings but now I’m eating wholegrain cereal because it is low in salt and good for fibre. I also used to eat a lot of processed food but now I’m starting to read labels on food packaging and switching to foods like wholegrain bread, baked potatoes and salads.”

As part of his new outlook, Ben plans to build up his walking to 40 or 50 minutes every day and maybe alternate with swimming sessions to get his heart pumping.

He said: “All of the advice makes a lot of sense. When I weigh it up, making time for a good brisk walk or a decent swim, it’s not too much to ask to have a healthy body. I want to set myself goals I can achieve so I’m not going to start off with anything too strenuous or hectic because I won’t stick to it. But walking for an hour a day, everyone can do that.”

Commentary by Prof. Alice Stanton

The results of Ben Dunne’s cardiovascular check-up show that he is doing very well in terms of blood pressure and cholesterol control. He is on a very good combination of blood pressure lowering and cholesterol lowering medications and also on aspirin – given his excellent levels he obviously takes these medications regularly. The fact that he gave up smoking ten years ago is also very important. The areas that Ben needs to improve upon are diet and exercise. He is overweight, because of a combination of what he is eating and relatively little exercise. As you can see from Ben’s comments above, as soon as he understood the benefits of a better diet (less calories and salt, less fatty and processed foods, more fruit and vegetables) and more regular activities such as walking or swimming, he became very motivated to make changes. These lifestyle changes will make it less likely that he will need more or higher doses of medications to control his blood pressure and cholesterol in years to come, and most importantly they will increase his chances of avoiding a heart attack or stroke.

MANAGING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE WITH MEDICATION



There are six main types of drug medication. All act to lower blood pressure but work in different ways.

Diuretics - medicines which help the kidneys to get rid of too much salt and water in the urine. This helps the blood pressure level to drop.

Calcium channel blockers - medicines which block the movement of calcium into the artery muscle cells. This enables the arteries to relax and widen so reducing blood pressure.

ACE inhibitors - block the production of a hormone that causes blood vessels to narrow.

Angiotensin II receptor blockers - help to limit the effects of a hormone that causes blood vessels to narrow.

Alpha blockers - cause arteries to relax and widen.

Beta blockers - these medicines work by slowing the heart rate and reducing blood pressure.

Few side effects.

Blood pressure medication, in general, has few side effects, and usually after a month or so you will know how it suits you. If you find a particular medicine doesn't suit you, or if you are reluctant to take a number of tablets daily, do tell your family doctor rather than suffer in silence.

Your doctor has the option of switching to a different type of medication, or to one tablet which acts in a number of different ways. If you are on medication for high blood pressure, you will be asked to return to your GP at least every six months for a blood pressure check.

“If patients know about their medication, understand why they are taking it and how it works, they are more likely to keep taking the tablets.”

Prof Alice Stanton

Keep taking the tablets.

Some people stop taking their blood pressure medication without informing their doctor and without realising the negative effects. “The reasons why people stop are many. It might be the cost, forgetfulness, poor organisation, such as not getting new tablets when the prescription finishes or simply not being clear about how long they need to take the tablets,” says Prof Alice Stanton. “Some patients think that when the prescription runs out they are cured.” A survey conducted among 1,200 GPs in 17 countries found that if patients know about their medication, understand why they are taking it and how it works, they are more likely to keep taking the tablets.



Drug Refund Scheme.

If you are on medication for high blood pressure, you may qualify under the Drug Refund Scheme. If you qualify, you pay a current maximum of €90 a month for all family medication regardless of the real cost of medication.

For further details, contact your GP, health centre or enquire at your local pharmacy.



IRISH THEATRE STAR ADELE KING PUTS HER HEART FIRST

Adele tells how she juggles a busy career with a healthy lifestyle



Best known as Twink, Adele King is no stranger to fame having spent more than 50 years lighting up Ireland's top stages. The talented dancer, singer and actress is renowned for her incredible energy and to this day, Adele remains as active and driven as ever.

Adele is the nation's beloved 'Panto Queen' but many of her fans will also remember the feisty performer when she starred in her own series, Twink on RTE and on RTE's Play The Game series. More recently Adele enjoyed immense success for her roles in the theatre productions Vagina Monologues, Menopause The Musical and John B Keane's Sive.

But where does Adele get all her energy?

Adele told us: "I have always led a healthy life which stems from my years of dancing. I eat very healthily and I go to the gym about four or five times a week. But I'm like everyone else - some days I moan and groan about going. It's the end result that keeps me going and no matter how reluctant I might be in the beginning, I always feel great afterwards. Staying active is important to me not only because it makes me feel good mentally and physically, but I know it helps to prevent high blood pressure, cholesterol and so on."

Not even a long-time dance injury in one knee can hold Adele back from getting physically active. A regular gym-goer, she has even adopted the mantra of her gym instructor - people don't stop exercising because they get old, people get old because they stop exercising.

She said: "Over the years my knee has played up on me. I've had keyhole surgery on it a few times but in the end I had to come to terms with the fact that I can no longer run. At my age - I'm 57 - I'm very conscious about my health and weight so I had to find something else that was low impact but just as good to get my heart rate going."

"Nobody can help the genes they inherit but we can do our bit by eating healthily and getting active. Prevention is definitely better than cure. That's my approach and I feel great."

Adele continued: "That's when I discovered walking. Not a leisurely stroll, I mean proper walking with arms working and breaking into a sweat. I used to have a giggle at speed walkers but now I've become a manic walker myself with my arms going ninety! I like to get a good pace going and really feel like I'm having a workout. I make sure to avoid impact activities or my knee will be in trouble again. Thankfully, I haven't had a moan out of it lately."

Fortunately for Adele, there is no history of heart disease in her family but she is very conscious of the importance of prevention.

She said: "I don't have a direct connection with heart disease but I'm very conscious about it ever since my good friend Dermot Morgan died from heart disease. I think we all owe it to ourselves to give ourselves the best chance of a good and healthy life."

Despite her slender figure, Adele admitted it isn't always easy to make healthy choices and she told us how she battles temptation like anyone else.

She said: "It's not that I don't like things like chocolate and so on - I make a conscious decision not to have them. More and more I look around me and see people who are very overweight and it scares the life out of me. As someone who has had to watch my weight all my life, I feel I have the right to say - folks - the older you get, the less you can get away with the sins of your youth. The problem for us all is that a few extra pounds turn into stones and before you know it, you're overweight."

"Nobody can help the genes they inherit but we can do our bit by eating healthily and getting active. Prevention is definitely better than cure. That's my approach and I feel great."

Commentary by Professor Eoin O'Brien

Adele is a healthy 57-year old woman, who has no symptoms to suggest any underlying cardiovascular disease. Of particular note is a good family history with both parents living well into their eighties. She leads a healthy life-style - she does not smoke or drink, uses salt and sugar sparingly, avoids foods high in fat or cholesterol and attends a gym four days a week to keep fit for her demanding stage career.

The results of Adele's cardiovascular check-up were very positive. Her 'numbers' were as follows:

	Adele's levels	Normal levels
Body mass index	22	20 to 25
Daytime blood pressure average (mm Hg)	126/74	less than 120/80
Night-time blood pressure average (mmHg)	117/65	less than 120/80
Fasting total cholesterol (mmol/l)	4.2	less than 5.0
Fasting low density cholesterol (mmol/l)	1.9	less than 3.0
Fasting blood sugar (mmol/l)	5.3	less than 6.0

Based on these figures Adele can be told that her cardiovascular health is excellent and that she should continue to follow her healthy life-style. The message for those of us who do not know our 'numbers' is to find out what they are. If you do not have a profile like Adele's, discuss with your doctor how best to get your numbers to normal. This may mean adopting a healthy lifestyle and taking medication if necessary. Remember - getting your numbers to normal can prevent stroke and heart attack.

HEALTHY EATING FOR EVERYONE

“Everyone will benefit from following the Food Pyramid guidelines - reducing fat, salt and sugar, increasing fruit, vegetables and fibre,” says Janis Morrissey, the Irish Heart Foundation’s dietitian.

Healthy eating is important to be fit and well. The Food Pyramid was created to show us at a glance the amount of each type of food we should eat each day for a healthy diet.

We should have most of our food choices from the bottom shelves of the Pyramid as these foods are low in calories and high in nutrients. We should have least choices from the top of the Pyramid as these are high calorie, low nourishment foods.



JANIS MORRISSEY
Irish Heart Foundation's dietitian

Choose very small amounts

Fats, High Fat/Sugar Snacks, Foods and Drinks

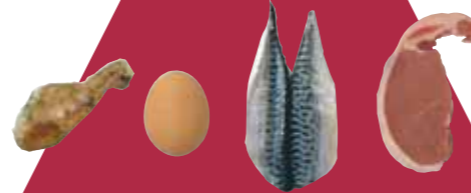
Use sparingly - choose fats high in monounsaturates or polyunsaturates. Limit fried foods to 1-2 times a week. Only have small amounts of high fat/sugar snacks and drinks and not too often.



Choose any 2

Meat, Fish, Eggs & Alternatives

Choose lean cuts of meats. Eat oily fish.



Choose any 3

Milk, Cheese & Yogurt

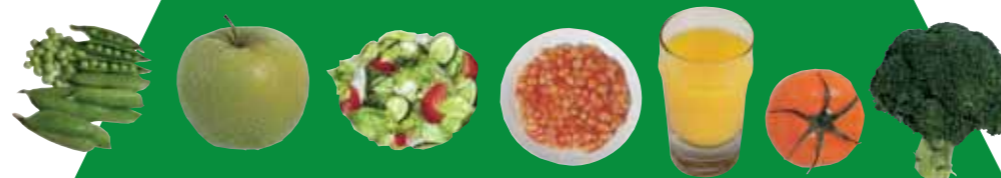
Choose low fat varieties.



Choose any 5

Fruit & Vegetables

Choose green leafy vegetables and citrus fruit frequently. Fruit juice only counts for one serving, each day.



Choose any 6+

Bread, Cereals & Potatoes

Eat these foods at each meal - high fibre is best.



DRINK WATER REGULARLY



...AT LEAST 8 CUPS OF FLUID A DAY

HEALTHY EATING TO PREVENT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE



fruit and veg

Fruit and Veg "It's really important to have your fruit and vegetables as these contain potassium which is thought to help lower blood pressure, as well as providing other benefits," says Janis Morrissey, dietitian at the Irish Heart Foundation. "Aim for at least five servings a day. It's easier than you think."

For example, you could have a small glass of fruit juice at breakfast, at lunchtime have a brown bread sandwich and add salad vegetables to your sandwich filling. Have vegetables at your main meal, then have fruit as a snack (such as an apple, orange or banana) once or twice during the day, or as dessert."



less salt

Salt "Salt is a big problem for people with high blood pressure. Gradually stop adding extra salt to food when cooking or serving. Most of the salt we eat comes from processed foods such as ready made soups, sauces and savoury snacks. Sodium in salt can create greater volumes of fluid in the body, which in turn can increase blood pressure," she says.

When looking at food labels, multiply the amount of sodium by 2.5 to work out the amount of salt. The body needs about 4 grams of salt a day and an acceptable **maximum** level for an adult is 6 grams or about 1 teaspoon.



less alcohol

What about alcohol? "Small amounts of alcohol may help to protect against heart disease. Alcohol contains antioxidants which fight harmful substances that can damage blood vessels over time. But this possible benefit must be measured against possible risk. Alcohol as part of a heart healthy diet is questionable, as alcohol raises blood pressure and contributes to heart and liver damage." If you do enjoy a social drink, stick to a maximum of 14 standard drinks a week if you are a woman and 21 standard drinks a week if you are a man. A standard drink is equal to a small glass of wine, a half pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider, or a pub measure of spirits.

What to eat when on medication for High Blood Pressure.



"Don't assume that medication on its own will reduce your high blood pressure and keep it down. The other lifestyle changes you are recommended to take, including healthy eating and following the Food Pyramid guidelines work together with the medication and give added benefits," says Janis Morrissey. "If you are overweight, eat very little of the foods from the top shelf of the Food Pyramid. Being overweight is a risk factor for blood pressure. Also, being active regularly will help increase your metabolism so that you burn off more calories and build up muscle. Taking steps to reduce blood pressure will also decrease weight. One is helping the other."

CAN SOME FOODS HELP TO REDUCE BLOOD PRESSURE?



Studies have shown that the combination of including three servings of low fat dairy products, five servings of fruit and vegetables and reducing salt have an effect in helping to reduce blood pressure.

What about claims that dairy products lower blood pressure?

Some yogurt products claim to help to lower blood pressure. Is this true? "Yes, some new food products can help in small ways, however these products tend to be expensive. The Irish Heart Foundation's advice is that these foods are not magic bullets and are not a replacement for continuing to take your prescribed medication," says Janis Morrissey. "They are not a replacement for eating healthy food, such as eating plenty of fruit and vegetables and lowering your salt intake. We would not like to see consumers buying these products at the expense of foods like fruit and vegetables and wholegrain cereals, which have a beneficial effect on blood pressure and health in general."

Portion size

Finally, Janis advises that healthy eating isn't just about food quality. Quantity is equally important. With over six out of 10 Irish adults overweight or obese, choosing smaller portion sizes can make a difference. Follow the Food Pyramid recommendations for portion sizes.

Avoid large servings of meat, poultry or fish - the recommended serving size is 2oz (50g) of lean cooked meat or poultry and 3oz (75g) fish. So two servings each day at your main meal adds up to 4oz (100g) of meat or 6oz (150g) of fish.



When it comes to eating and being active a small change can make a big difference providing you keep it up over time.



GET ACTIVE

Lower your blood pressure... get more active.

Regular physical activity helps you to keep a healthy level of blood pressure and can also help you to lower your blood pressure if it is high. Regular physical activity brings many other benefits for your heart and health, as well as a sense of well-being.

The good news...

- It takes 30 minutes or more of aerobic, physical activity 5 days a week to enjoy these benefits.
- Physical activity can vary from leisure activities such as walking, cycling, jogging, dancing or swimming to more routine tasks such as gardening, vacuuming or cleaning the house.
- Activities can be spread over one, two or three shorter sessions e.g. 2 x 10 minutes walking and 1 x 20 minutes of gardening. Any one session needs to be for 10 minutes or longer to get health benefits.
- Activity does not need to be vigorous, a moderate level of intensity is required for health benefits. For example you only need to walk at a moderate intensity or hearty pace.

A hearty pace...

- Causes your heart to beat a little faster.
- Makes you breathe deeper and faster but not so that you are out of breath.
- Makes you will feel warmer all over.



ON THE MOVE

Safely on the move - how to get more active

Getting started: Talk to your doctor before starting a new physical activity or routine, especially if you have a heart or lung condition, have already been diagnosed with high blood pressure or are overweight.

Choose Well: Choose an activity or a variety of activities that you enjoy – you are far more likely to stick to it.

Know your options: Aerobic activity, such as walking, gardening or swimming, works the heart and lungs and is the best type of activity for a healthy blood pressure. Consider brisk walking, swimming, dancing or an exercise class with a qualified leader. A good class will include activities to improve your aerobic fitness, as well as flexibility, strength and balance coordination, which are also important.

HOW OFTEN HOW MUCH AND HOW LONG?

FROM COUCH POTATO...

Start with two short (5-10 minutes) bouts of easy activity per week. Don't push yourself.



TO MODEST MOVER

Increase your activity to three to four 10-15 minutes of physical activity at a moderate or hearty pace.



TO HEARTY HUMAN

Aim to be active for 30 minutes or more five days a week. You can break this into several short bouts (e.g. 20 minutes walking; 15 minutes gardening; 10 minutes stretching).

To lose weight: Build up to 60 minutes or more of activity at a moderate intensity (or hearty pace) most days of the week. Even when you have lost weight, aim to be active for this amount to help you maintain weight loss.

Listen to your body: never push your body too hard, especially if you have high blood pressure, are getting older or have a heart condition. You will know if the activity is suitable and not too demanding if you are still able to carry on a conversation during the activity. Stop immediately if you feel unwell or in pain. Consult your doctor if your symptoms remain or return.



GET ACTIVE



COLETTE KIELY

Living with high blood pressure and diabetes
Colette Kiely, from Artane, Dublin, tells her story.

At the age of 45, Colette Kiely from Dublin was more than a little surprised to find out she had high blood pressure. She didn't feel any different, she didn't feel stressed. When taking part in a study on diabetes, a doctor confirmed Colette's blood pressure was on the high side.

The 59-year-old said: "I got a surprise when they told me. It was 14 years ago and I thought I was far too young to have it. But at the same time I thought, if I have it, I'll do something about it. I knew I had to look after my health or I would be at risk of a heart attack or stroke. My husband had a heart attack and it did have a big affect on me. I realised it can happen to anybody."

On finding out she had high blood pressure, Colette took to the streets – literally – and started walking. She said: "I walked a bit anyway so I had an advantage that it was something I liked already. Once I found out about my blood pressure I decided to make a bigger effort. Instead of just popping to the local shop, I went walking for an hour most days. I felt it was doing me and my blood pressure some good."

She added: "Thanks to the walking I've also managed to lose some weight. I'm not Twiggy but I'm not as overweight as I was and I feel much healthier for it."

As well as getting more physical activity, Colette also tackled her diet. As a diabetic, she had made some amendments such as avoiding sweets. Overall eating healthily did not pose big changes for Colette who already felt she ate a reasonably balanced diet. She said: "I was always fairly healthy. I love vegetables and meat and now I try and eat more brown bread, porridge, lean meat and fruit. Lucky for me I was never a big sweet eater because I can't really have them now that I'm diabetic. I prefer savoury foods. Sometimes I do fall by the way side and have some chocolate but if I do, I make up for it with extra walking. It's all about balance."

"MY HUSBAND HAD A HEART ATTACK AND IT DID HAVE A BIG AFFECT ON ME. I REALISED IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYBODY."

But Colette did confess her weakness for salt. In fact where other people preferred to add sugar, Colette added salt. She said: "I love a banana sandwich but my friends think I'm nuts when I put salt on it because they add sugar. When I was first diagnosed with high blood pressure, I ate a lot of salt on my dinner and people did notice. But not any more. I have cut it down a lot and I only take a little bit now."

Like any condition, it is important to have regular check-ups and monitor for any changes. Colette is quite vigilant about her lifestyle but she admitted, she does not know her blood pressure numbers. She said: "My blood pressure is checked regularly but I find it difficult to remember the exact figure. If someone says its fine, then that's enough for me. I take two blood pressure tablets to control it. I remember asking why I needed to take two tablets that sounded the same. The doctor explained that both tablets provide the best balance for me and that makes sense."

"I WALKED A BIT ANYWAY SO I HAD AN ADVANTAGE THAT IT WAS SOMETHING I LIKED ALREADY."



Commentary by Prof. Alice Stanton

As Colette has diabetes mellitus and high blood pressure, it is even more important that she has regular checks on all risk factors for cardiovascular disease. If any of these are found to be increased, action should be taken immediately. If not, Colette's risk of heart attack, stroke, or kidney damage increases greatly. Hence I was very pleased to see that Colette's most recent levels were very good.

	Colette's levels	Levels recommended for diabetics
Blood Pressure (mm Hg)	131/69	no greater than 130/85
Cholesterol (mmol/l)	4.3	no greater than 5.0
Smoking (cigs/day)	0	0
Glycosylated hemoglobin (%) <small>(measure of sugar control)</small>	6.5	no greater than 7.0

Colette obviously follows a healthy lifestyle and takes all of the medications recommended for her. I have only one additional piece of advice which is from now on, she should know her own blood pressure, sugar and cholesterol numbers – this will help her to take more control of her own health.

CHOLESTEROL AND HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Cholesterol problems often occur along with high blood pressure and both are risk factors for heart disease. Cholesterol is a type of fat naturally found in our blood and we all need some cholesterol for a healthy body.

However, there are two types of cholesterol.

- HDL, which stands for high density lipoprotein, is known as **good cholesterol** because it helps to break down fats and pass them out of the body. High levels of HDL cholesterol protect against heart disease. You build up your HDL cholesterol level by regular physical activity and stopping smoking.
- LDL, low density lipoprotein, is called **bad cholesterol** because it can create a build up of fatty deposits on the artery walls, causing them to narrow, harden and block, leading to heart attack or stroke.

High levels of LDL cholesterol increase risk of heart disease. You increase LDL cholesterol by eating too many foods high in saturated (animal) fats. You can help your heart health - particularly if you have been diagnosed with high cholesterol - by cutting down on butter, hard margarine, lard, cream, high-fat cheese, fatty meat, cakes, biscuits and chocolates, crisps and other savoury snack foods. Avoid processed foods and ready-made meals whose labels show they contain saturated fats.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO TO LOWER YOUR CHOLESTEROL?

- Aim to be a healthy weight for your size.
- Eat oily fish twice a week.
- Eat more fruit and vegetables, at least five portions every day.
- Eat more wholegrain cereals and breads, jacket potatoes, rice and pasta.
- Eat lean meat and poultry. Trim fat off meat and skin off chicken, drain oil from cooked dishes containing minced meat.
- Choose low fat dairy products.
- Choose spreads made from sunflower, olive or rapeseed oil.
- Choose fewer foods from the top shelf of the Food Pyramid. See page 14
- Use low fat cooking methods such as grilling and oven-baking rather than frying or roasting.
- Be more physically active. See pages 18 and 19



NO SMOKING

Lower your blood pressure... stop smoking

It's never too late to stop smoking and your heart and lung health begins to improve after you stop, no matter how old you are or how long you have smoked. There is support available to help you stop.

- The National Smokers' Quitline in association with the Irish Cancer Society, offers advice and support to help you stop smoking. Phone 1850 201 203.
- Your GP will have advice and literature on the benefits of stopping smoking.
- Your local HSE Health Promotion Team employs Smoking Cessation Officers who organise stop smoking clinics and advice to community groups.
- Your local pharmacy can offer advice and support on therapies, such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) which are available in the form of gum, patches and inhalers.

National Smokers' Quitline
1850 201 203

REDUCE THE STRESS...

Relaxation slows breathing and pulse rates, releases muscle tension and produces a sense of well-being. Research shows that relaxation training bolsters the body's immune system and its ability to heal injuries and fight illness, including heart disease and diabetes.

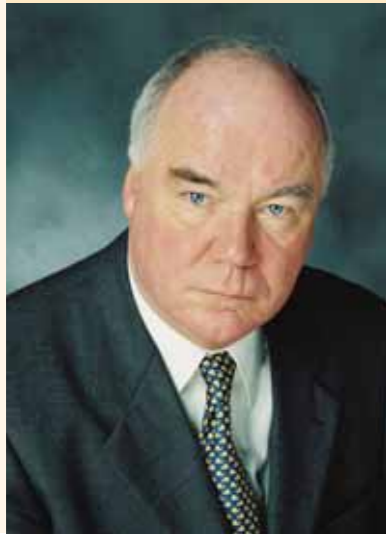
Help yourself to relax by trying the following:

- Deep breathing exercises and muscle relaxation maintaining deep slow breathing
- Visualise images or memories (such as holiday memories) that evoke serenity, happiness or joy
- Explore some complementary therapies such as massage, yoga and reflexology which slow down the heart and relax the body
- Keep a stress journal to help you identify stressful situations and your response
- Get adequate sleep
- Be active more often. Find something you enjoy and ideally do it with a friend
- Try new hobbies, sports or social activities you enjoy
- Develop friendships and confide in those you trust
- Become part of your local community, through social activities, voluntary work or joining in on physical activity events.

Relaxation to lower blood pressure is not a replacement for dietary changes, being physically active or taking medication.



HEART ATTACK AND STROKE



DR. BRIAN MAURER

Medical Director
Irish Heart Foundation

“Most of us probably do not realise how important the heart is for life until something happens either to ourselves or to someone we love. Many of us take for granted the hard work the heart does every second to keep us alive and well and very often we do not take good care of our heart.”

Dr Brian Maurer,
Medical Director IHF

What does the heart do?

The heart is a muscular bag, which squeezes and relaxes to pump blood around our bodies. It beats nearly 100,000 times a day and like any engine or pump it needs fuel and care to stay working. Unfortunately if we neglect to look after it and as we grow older, there is a greater risk of damage to the heart and blood vessels.

The heart and blood vessel system carrying blood is called the cardiovascular system. Diseases that affect our hearts and blood vessels include heart attacks, angina (coronary heart disease) and strokes. It is important to know about these diseases as we can help prevent them.

What is coronary heart disease?

Coronary heart disease occurs when a gradual build-up of fatty pieces or plaque narrows the coronary arteries. This process is known as atherosclerosis.

WHAT IS A HEART ATTACK?

A heart attack occurs when the coronary arteries supplying blood and oxygen to the heart muscle become blocked as a result of a build up of plaque or fatty material. The plaque eventually breaks off and a clot forms in the artery, which blocks the blood supply. If the blood supply is cut off for more than a few minutes, muscle cells get permanently injured and die.

Symptoms of a heart attack

If you are having a heart attack, you might:

- Feel an uncomfortable pressure, squeezing or pain in the centre of the chest, arm or jaw that lasts more than a few minutes.
- Have pain, which spreads to the shoulders, neck or arms.
- Feel light-headed and that you are going to faint. Some people start to sweat, feel sick or feel that it is hard to breathe.

Women may experience less typical symptoms than men such as:

- A dull ache or heavy feeling in the chest.
- Chest pain which can spread to the back or stomach
- Chest pain that feels like indigestion
- Feeling light-headed or dizzy as well as having chest pain

What should I do?

You may not have all of these symptoms. If you only have some of them, don't wait. Get help fast by phoning 112 for an ambulance and calling your doctor. Meanwhile you should sit or lie down.

What can I do to prevent heart disease?

Many people know that certain risk factors influence and increase their chances of getting heart disease. Risk factors that we can change or influence include smoking, having a high cholesterol level or high blood pressure, being overweight and not being physically active.

There are other risk factors, which we cannot change. Heart disease is inherited so if there is a history in your family, you are more likely to get it. As we get older, we are more at risk of heart disease.

Fortunately at any age and even if you have a history of heart disease in your family you can reduce your risk of developing the disease. Making some changes now can make a difference for a longer and healthier life. All of the changes are outlined in this magazine.



For more information call our Patient Helpline 1890 432 787 or visit www.irishheart.ie

WHAT IS A STROKE?

A stroke can happen due to a clot in the blood vessels in the brain or as a result of a bleed (hemorrhage) from a burst blood vessel into the brain.

Symptoms of a stroke

Stroke symptoms occur as a result of damage to nerve cells in a part of your brain because the blood supply has been cut off. Symptoms include:

- Numbness of the face, arm or leg
- Confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Loss of sight in one or both eyes
- Loss of balance, dizziness or difficulty walking
- Severe headache with no known cause

(If you or a loved one experience any of the above symptoms, call emergency services immediately).

Effects of a stroke

As a result of the stroke, the nerve cells in the brain can't function and the part of the body controlled by those cells also shuts down. The effects of a stroke are worse in the beginning. However there is usually some amount of recovery in the first six weeks after a stroke.

What is a TIA (transient ischemic attack)?

In some people, the clot in the brain dissolves quickly and the muscle weakness, loss of sensation or loss of vision is only for a very short time. This means the effects of the attack disappear in less than one hour. Although these people are lucky that they did not get permanent damage, a TIA is a warning of future strokes and will need to be investigated further.

Can strokes be treated or prevented?

Lifestyle factors, especially stopping smoking and managing high blood pressure help reduce the risk of stroke. To prevent stroke it also helps to have a healthy level of cholesterol. Your doctor or practice nurse may advise on changes in your lifestyle. In addition your doctor may prescribe tablets to reduce blood pressure or tablets such as aspirin and warfarin to reduce clotting.

**TALK TO US...
WE ARE HERE
TO HELP YOU...**

**IHF Patient Helpline - Locall
1890 432 787**

Do you have questions or concerns about your heart health or that of a loved one?

For information and advice on heart conditions and stroke, symptoms and prevention, talk to a nurse in confidence.

Call the Irish Heart Foundation Patient Helpline on Locall 1890 432 787 Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm

For more information contact your family doctor, pharmacist, the Irish Heart Foundation or your local Health Service Executive office.



Irish Heart Foundation

4 Clyde Road
Ballsbridge
Dublin 4
01 6685001

Helpline: 1890 432 787
www.irisheart.ie

Health Service Executive

Health Promotion Service
Contacts

HSE South
021 492 1641

HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster
01 463 2800

HSE West
091 548 321

HSE Dublin North East
046 907 6400



The Irish Heart Foundation is Ireland's only charity dedicated to the reduction of premature death and disability from heart disease and stroke. Over 90 per cent of our income comes from public and corporate donations. We depend on your goodwill and generosity to continue our work.

Name: _____ **Email:** _____
Address: _____ **Tel:** _____

YES, I'd like to support the Irish Heart Foundation's goal to reduce premature death and disability from heart disease and stroke.

CHEQUE / POSTAL ORDER / CREDIT CARD

I would like to make a gift of: €45 €75 €125 €250

Other € _____

If you pay income tax, a gift of €250 or more could be worth an extra 72 per cent to us!

I enclose a cheque / postal order Please debit my Visa/ Mastercard

CARD NUMBER: _____

EXPIRY DATE: ____ / ____

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____ **TEL:** _____

Please send to: **The Irish Heart Foundation, 4 Clyde Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.**
 Or if you would like to give your details by phone, you can call us on 01 668 5001.

Know your blood pressure and keep it down



High Blood Pressure
is best managed by
you **and** your doctor



LOVE YOUR  **LOWER YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE**

for information and advice on **high blood pressure** call our helpline or visit our website

1890 432 787 irishheart.ie 
Féilhméannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive