NMG FITNESS

THE NMG

Blood Pressure Guide

High and low blood pressure after 40. What it is, how to check it, the signs to watch for, and how food, walking and strength training can bring it down.

Know
THE NUMBERS

Check
GET TESTED

Move
WALK AND LIFT

Eat
LESS SALT

WELCOME

Start Here

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms, which is exactly why it's dangerous. This guide is short, plain English, and built so you can act on it today.

What's inside

- ✓ **The numbers.** What your reading means, and what's high, low and ideal.
- ✓ **The checks.** Where to get tested, free, and how to check at home.
- ✓ **The signs.** What to look out for, and when it's an emergency.
- ✓ **The fixes.** Food, alcohol, sleep, walking and simple strength work.
- ✓ **The plan.** A 6-week walking plan, a short strength routine and a tracker.

Three things to take from it

- ✓ **You can feel completely fine and still have high blood pressure.** The only way to know is to check.
- ✓ **It's very treatable.** Lifestyle changes work, and medication is there if you need it. Neither is a failure.
- ✓ **Small changes add up.** A few points off your reading makes a real difference to your risk of a stroke or heart attack.

How to use it

- ✓ Start with the numbers, then book a check if you haven't had one in the last year.
- ✓ Do the 6-week walking plan. It's the easiest win.
- ✓ Pass it to a mate. Plenty of men over 40 have never had theirs checked.

> **Good to know.** This guide is general information, not medical advice. If you're worried about your blood pressure, speak to your GP or pharmacist. If you take blood pressure medication, keep taking it unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

THE SILENT ONE

YOU CAN'T FEEL IT. BUT YOUR ARTERIES CAN.

High blood pressure is one of the biggest causes of strokes and heart attacks, and most people who have it feel perfectly well. Finding out is quick, free and painless.

1 in 3 adults in England has high blood pressure, according to Blood Pressure UK

4.2m people in England have it and don't know. That's about 3 in 10 of those affected (ONS)

5 mins is all a free check takes at most pharmacies if you're 40 or over

> *"It's not the dramatic ones that get you. It's the ones nobody checked."*
>
> Why this guide exists

THE BASICS

What Do the Numbers Mean?

Your reading has two numbers, shown like 120 over 80. Both matter.

The two numbers

- ✓ **The top number (systolic)** is the pressure when your heart beats and pushes blood out.
- ✓ **The bottom number (diastolic)** is the pressure between beats, when your heart rests.
- ✓ It's measured in mmHg (millimetres of mercury). You'll just see it written as, say, 124/78.

What the numbers mean

Low	Below 90/60. Often fine, but see your GP if you get symptoms.
Ideal	Between 90/60 and 120/80.
Higher than ideal	Between 120/80 and 140/90. Not high yet, but worth acting on now.
High (at the GP or pharmacy)	140/90 or above.
High (at home)	135/85 or above. Home readings are usually a little lower.
Very high	180/120 or above. Get medical help the same day (see page 9).

Which number matters more?

- ✓ Both count. Either one being high is enough for a diagnosis.
- ✓ As you get older, the top number tends to creep up, and it becomes the bigger guide to stroke and heart risk.

> **One reading isn't a diagnosis.** Pressure goes up and down through the day, with stress, caffeine and exercise. Your GP will normally repeat it, or ask you to track it at home, before deciding.

WHY IT MATTERS

What High Blood Pressure Does

Think of it as constant extra force on your arteries and your heart. Over years, that wears them down.

The risks of leaving it

- **Stroke.** Damaged or blocked blood vessels in the brain.
- **Heart attack and heart failure.** The heart works harder and the arteries narrow.
- **Kidney disease.** The kidneys rely on tiny blood vessels that high pressure damages.
- **Vascular dementia and sight loss.** The brain and the eyes are both affected.
- **Erection problems.** Blood vessels everywhere are affected, not just in the heart.

What raises your risk

- Getting older (it creeps up through your 40s and 50s).
- Family history of high blood pressure, heart disease or stroke.
- Carrying extra weight, especially around the middle.
- Too much salt, too much alcohol, and eating few fruit and vegetables.
- Not moving much, poor sleep and ongoing stress.
- Smoking, diabetes, sleep apnoea and kidney problems.
- Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds, where it's more common.

The good news

- Most of the risk list is things you can change.
- Bringing your numbers down cuts your risk of stroke and heart attack. The research is clear on this.
- The earlier you find it, the easier it is to fix.

> **Remember:** you don't need to be unfit or overweight to have high blood pressure. Plenty of fit, healthy-looking men have it.

THE SIGNS

Symptoms: What to Look For

The honest answer is that high blood pressure usually has none. That's why checks matter more than symptoms.

High blood pressure

- ✓ **Most people feel completely normal.** Don't wait for symptoms.
- ✓ Occasionally: headaches, blurred vision or nosebleeds. They can have other causes, so see your GP if you get them often.
- ✓ If your pressure is very high, you may feel unwell, but you can't count on it.

Call 999 if high blood pressure comes with

- ✓ Chest pain, or pain spreading to your arm, jaw or back.
- ✓ Severe breathlessness.
- ✓ A sudden, severe headache, confusion or a seizure.
- ✓ Face drooping, arm weakness or slurred speech. Think FAST: Face, Arm, Speech, Time to call 999.

Low blood pressure

- ✓ Feeling dizzy or lightheaded, especially when you stand up.
- ✓ Blurred vision, feeling weak or unsteady.
- ✓ Nausea, a pounding heartbeat or confusion.
- ✓ Fainting.
- ✓ If you faint, have chest pain or fall, get medical help.

> **The rule:** no symptoms doesn't mean no problem. If you're over 40 and haven't been checked in the last year, get checked.

GET CHECKED

Where to Get Your Blood Pressure Tested

It's quick, painless and often free. There are a few easy ways to do it.

Your options

- ✓ **Pharmacy.** In England, adults aged 40 and over can get a free check at many pharmacies. You often don't need an appointment.
- ✓ **GP surgery.** Book a check with the nurse or healthcare assistant.
- ✓ **NHS Health Check.** If you're 40 to 74 in England and don't have a heart condition, you're invited every five years. It includes blood pressure and cholesterol.
- ✓ **At home.** Buy a validated upper-arm monitor (next page).
- ✓ **Some workplaces and gyms** offer checks too. Ask.

What happens next

- ✓ The nurse takes a reading, often twice. If it's high, you'll usually be asked to check again.
- ✓ Your GP may ask you to monitor at home for a week, or wear a 24-hour monitor, to confirm it.
- ✓ You may have a blood and urine test to check your kidneys and cholesterol.
- ✓ If it is high, the plan usually starts with lifestyle changes, and sometimes tablets.

How often?

- ✓ At least every five years if your readings are normal.
- ✓ Every year if it's higher than ideal.
- ✓ As often as your GP advises if you're being treated.

> **The excuse I hear most:** "I feel fine." Almost everybody with high blood pressure does.

AT HOME

How to Check It Yourself

A home monitor gives a more accurate picture than one reading at the surgery, and it's easy once you know how.

1 **Use a validated monitor**
Choose an upper-arm cuff, not a wrist one. The British and Irish Hypertension Society and the BHF list validated monitors. Check the cuff size fits.

2 **Rest first**
Sit quietly for 5 minutes. No coffee, exercise, smoking or talking for 30 minutes beforehand. Empty your bladder.

3 **Get the position right**
Sit with your back supported, feet flat and legs uncrossed. Rest your arm on a table with the cuff at heart height.

4 **Take two readings**
Wait one minute between them and write both down.

5 **Do it twice a day**
Morning and evening, ideally for a week. Your GP may ask for 4 to 7 days.

6 **Take your diary in**
Bring the log (page 21) and your monitor to your appointment.

Common mistakes

- ✓ Taking it straight after a walk, a coffee or a stressful call.
- ✓ Talking, or crossing your legs.
- ✓ Checking five times a day. It just makes you anxious.
- ✓ Changing medication because of one reading. Talk to your GP first.

> **Tip:** if the first reading is higher than the second, that's normal. Nerves and rushing push the first one up.

WHAT TO DO

Your Reading and What to Do About It

A simple guide, based on your numbers.

If your reading is...	
Below 90/60, and you feel fine	Nothing to do. Some healthy, fit people just run low.
Below 90/60 with dizziness or fainting	See your GP and mention any medicines you take.
90/60 to 120/80	Ideal. Keep doing what you're doing and recheck every few years.
120/80 to 140/90	Higher than ideal. Start the changes in this guide and recheck within a year.
140/90 or above (135/85 at home)	Book a GP appointment and bring your home readings. Don't panic: it's very treatable.
180/120 or above	Contact your GP or call NHS 111 the same day, even if you feel fine.
180/120 or above with warning signs (chest pain, breathlessness, confusion, speech or vision changes)	Call 999.

What your GP may do

- ✓ Repeat the reading and check it at home to confirm.
- ✓ Check your kidneys, cholesterol and blood sugar, and look at your overall heart risk.
- ✓ Suggest lifestyle changes first, and tablets if your pressure or your risk is high.
- ✓ Review you regularly so the plan keeps working.

> **Already on medication?** Keep taking it. Don't stop or change the dose because your numbers look good. That's usually the medication working.

THE OTHER SIDE

Low Blood Pressure

Low blood pressure isn't a problem in itself, unless it causes symptoms. For plenty of healthy, active people it's simply normal.

What counts as low

- ✓ Below 90/60 is generally considered low.
- ✓ If you feel well, it usually needs no treatment.
- ✓ It matters if you feel dizzy, faint or unsteady, or if it has dropped suddenly.

Common causes

- ✓ Dehydration, heat, or a long time standing still.
- ✓ Standing up too quickly.
- ✓ Some medicines, including some blood pressure tablets, water tablets and antidepressants.
- ✓ Alcohol, illness, or being run down.
- ✓ Heart, hormone or other health conditions, which a GP can check for.

What helps

- ✓ Sit or lie down and drink some water when you feel an episode coming on.
- ✓ Stand up slowly, especially in the morning and after sitting a long time.
- ✓ Drink enough through the day and don't skip meals.
- ✓ Smaller, more regular meals can help if you feel faint after eating.
- ✓ Tell your GP if you're on tablets and feel dizzy. Don't stop them yourself.

See your GP if

- ✓ You faint, or feel faint regularly.
- ✓ You've had a fall.
- ✓ You have chest pain, breathlessness or a very fast heartbeat.
- ✓ The dizziness is new, or getting worse.

Eat and Drink for Better Numbers

You don't need a special diet. A few changes, repeated, do most of the work.

1 Cut the salt

Aim for no more than 6 g a day, about one level teaspoon, from everything. Most of it is hidden in bread, ham, bacon, cheese, soups, sauces and ready meals, not the salt shaker.

2 Read the label

Per 100 g, more than 1.5 g salt is high and 0.3 g or less is low.

3 Eat more fruit and veg

Aim for at least five portions a day. Potassium in bananas, potatoes, beans and leafy greens helps balance salt.

4 Keep alcohol to 14 units a week or less

Spread over several days with alcohol-free days. A pint of beer is about 2 units and a large glass of wine about 3.

5 Go easy on caffeine

Tea and coffee are fine in sensible amounts. Skip the energy drinks, and don't have a coffee 30 minutes before you check your pressure.

A low-salt day

- ✓ **Breakfast:** porridge with berries, or eggs on wholegrain toast.
- ✓ **Lunch:** a big salad or leftover home-cooked chicken, rice and veg.
- ✓ **Snack:** fruit, unsalted nuts or plain yoghurt.
- ✓ **Dinner:** fish or lean meat, potatoes and two types of veg, flavoured with herbs, garlic and lemon.

FOOD AND DRINK

Easy Swaps and Where Salt Hides

Most of your salt isn't what you add. It's what's already in the food.

Easy swaps

Salted crisps or nuts	Unsalted nuts, fruit or a plain yoghurt
Bacon or ham	Fresh chicken, eggs or tinned fish in water
Stock cubes, ketchup, soy sauce	Herbs, spices, lemon, garlic, pepper
Ready meal	Cook a double batch and freeze half
Takeaway or pub meal	Choose grilled over fried, and skip the extra sauce
Table salt on your plate	Taste first, then add pepper

Where the salt hides

- ✓ Bread, rolls, wraps and pastries.
- ✓ Bacon, ham, sausages and other processed meat.
- ✓ Cheese, soups, sauces and gravy.
- ✓ Pizza, ready meals, takeaways and restaurant food.
- ✓ Crisps, salted nuts, and many breakfast cereals.

Simple habits

- ✓ Cook from scratch more often, even if it's just two nights a week.
- ✓ Compare labels and pick the lower salt version.
- ✓ Add flavour with herbs, spices, citrus and garlic. Your taste buds adjust in a few weeks.

> **Check first:** if you have kidney problems or take certain blood pressure tablets (like ACE inhibitors), ask your GP or pharmacist before using salt substitutes or adding lots of potassium.

LIFESTYLE

The Rest of the Picture

Food is only half of it. These help just as much, and are free.

Weight

- ✓ Carrying extra weight, especially around the middle, pushes pressure up.
- ✓ Losing even a few kilos often brings your numbers down.
- ✓ Aim for slow and steady, with protein, walking and strength training.

Sleep

- ✓ Poor sleep keeps your blood pressure higher.
- ✓ Aim for 7 to 8 hours and a regular bedtime.
- ✓ Loud snoring, gasping at night and daytime tiredness can be signs of sleep apnoea, which raises blood pressure. Mention it to your GP.

Stress

- ✓ Short bursts of stress push pressure up for a while, and ongoing stress makes it harder to stay on track.
- ✓ Five minutes of slow breathing, in for 4 and out for 6, can help in the moment.
- ✓ A daily walk outdoors is one of the best stress tools you have.

LIFESTYLE

Smoking, Medication and Safe Training

A few things to get right before you ramp up.

Smoking

- ✓ Smoking damages artery walls, so it adds to the damage high pressure does.
- ✓ Your pharmacy or GP can help you stop, and it's free.

If you're on medication

- ✓ Take it as prescribed. Lifestyle and tablets work together.
- ✓ Don't stop or change the dose because your numbers look good. That's usually the tablets working.
- ✓ Some tablets can make you dizzy when you stand quickly. Tell your GP if they do.
- ✓ Some, like beta-blockers, change your heart rate, so don't judge effort by pulse alone. Use the talk test.

Check with your GP before training hard if

- ✓ Your blood pressure is high and hasn't been checked or treated yet.
- ✓ You've had chest pain, a heart problem or a stroke.
- ✓ You get breathless or dizzy with light effort.
- ✓ Your reading is 180/120 or above. Wait until it's under control.

> **The bottom line:** for most people, walking and gentle strength work are safe and good for you. If in doubt, ask your GP first.

MOVE MORE

How Exercise Brings It Down

This is where you have the most control. Regular exercise can bring blood pressure down, and it helps your heart, your mood and your waistline too.

Average drop in the top number, by type of exercise

Wall sits and other isometric holds	about 8 points
Cardio plus strength combined	about 6 points
Strength training (squats, push-ups)	about 4.5 points
Walking, cycling, running (cardio)	about 4.5 points
HIIT	about 4 points

What the research says

- ✓ These figures come from a large 2023 review of 270 trials and almost 16,000 people, published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine.
- ✓ Isometric holds, where you stay still and squeeze, came out best, though it's early evidence and all types helped.
- ✓ Even a few points matters. Bigger trials link a 10 point drop to roughly a fifth fewer major heart and stroke events.
- ✓ It takes a few weeks of regular exercise to see the change, and it only lasts while you keep going.

> **The point:** the best exercise is the one you'll keep doing. Start with walking.

MOVE MORE

Making It Safe and Making It Work

Simple rules that keep you safe, and keep you going.

Make it safe

- ✓ If your blood pressure is high and hasn't been checked or treated yet, see your GP before hard training.
- ✓ Keep breathing. Holding your breath while you lift sends pressure sky high.
- ✓ Start easy. Build up over weeks, not days.
- ✓ Stop and get help if you get chest pain, severe breathlessness or feel faint.

How hard should it feel?

- ✓ **Walking:** brisk but able to talk.
- ✓ **Strength:** the last couple of reps should feel tough but controlled. Never a struggle.
- ✓ **Holds:** a steady squeeze, with normal breathing.

Make it stick

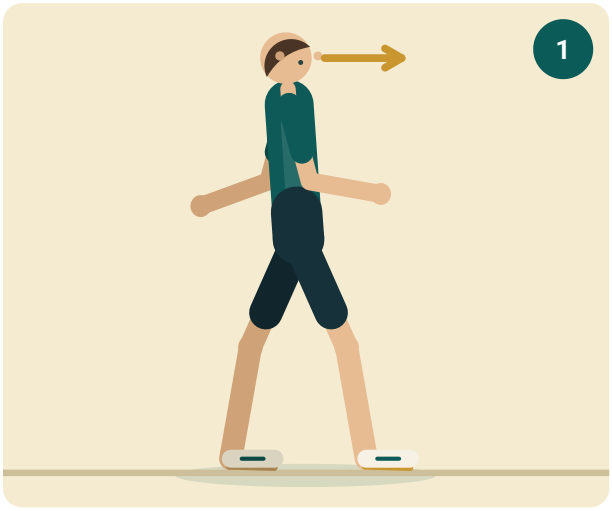
- ✓ Little and often beats occasional and heroic.
- ✓ Pair it with something you already do, like after breakfast or when the kettle's on.
- ✓ Track your readings so you can see the progress.
- ✓ Book it in like an appointment.

> **Remember:** you don't need a gym. Your living room, a wall and a staircase are enough.

THE MOVES

1 Walk and Step

Easy to do anywhere, and the base of the whole plan.



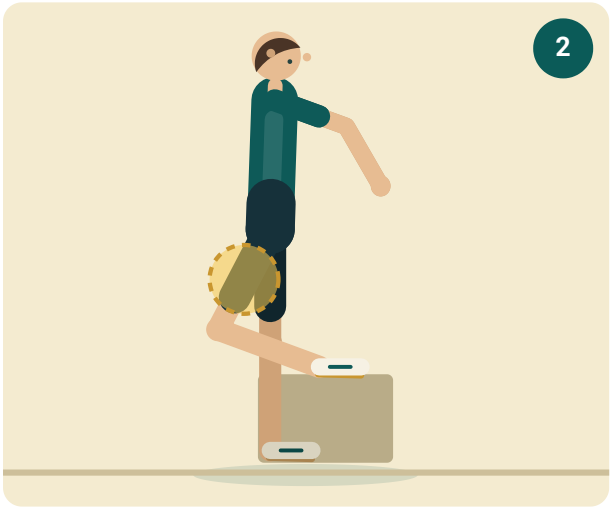
Brisk Walking

WHOLE BODY · HEART

1. Stand tall, shoulders relaxed, eyes ahead.
2. Walk fast enough that you could talk but not sing.
3. Swing your arms and take slightly longer strides.
4. Finish with a slow couple of minutes.

⏱ Build up to 30 minutes, 5 days a week

COACHING CUE The talk test: breathing a bit harder, still able to speak in full sentences. Hills and a bag make it harder.



Step-Up

LEGS · GLUTES · BALANCE

1. Stand in front of a low, sturdy step.
2. Place your whole foot on the step.
3. Push through that heel and stand up tall.
4. Step down slowly. Swap legs.

⏱ 2 sets of 8 each leg

COACHING CUE Use the stairs at home. Hold a rail if you need to. Don't rush it.



Sit-to-Stand

LEGS · GLUTES

1. Sit on a sturdy chair, feet flat, shoulder-width apart.
2. Lean slightly forward.
3. Stand up without using your hands if you can.
4. Sit back slowly, taking 3 seconds.

⏱ 2 sets of 8 to 10

COACHING CUE If it's easy, slow the lowering or hold a weight at your chest.

THE MOVES

2 Hold and Push

Strength moves that are kind to your joints and good for your pressure.



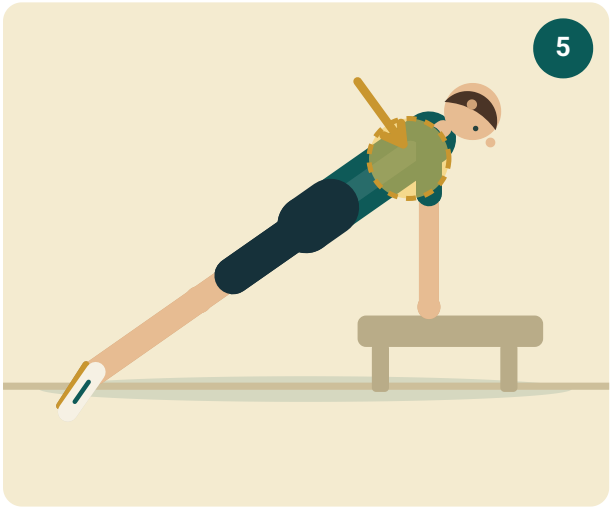
Wall Sit

THIGHS · GLUTES · BLOOD PRESSURE

1. Lean your back flat against a wall.
2. Walk your feet out and slide down until your thighs are close to level.
3. Knees over ankles, arms resting on your thighs.
4. Hold, breathing normally. Slide back up.

⏱ 3 holds of 20 to 30 seconds

COACHING CUE Keep breathing. Don't hold your breath. Come up a bit higher if it's too hard.



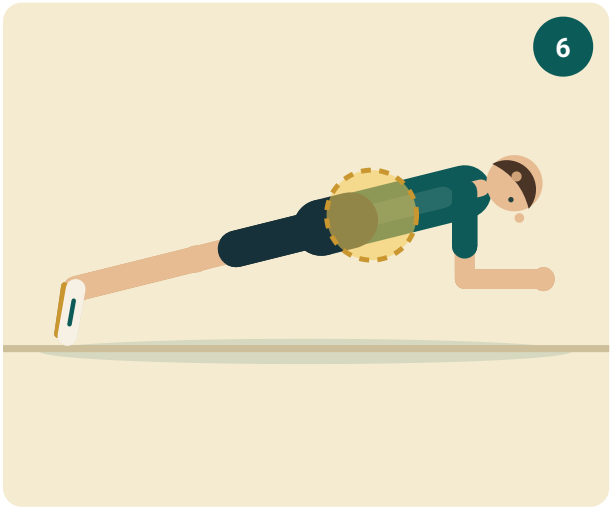
Incline Push-Up

CHEST · SHOULDERS · ARMS

1. Hands on a bench or counter, a bit wider than your shoulders.
2. Walk your feet back into a straight line.
3. Lower your chest to the bench.
4. Press back up.

⏱ 2 sets of 8 to 10

COACHING CUE Breathe out as you push. Lower the surface to make it harder.



Plank

CORE (ABS)

1. Forearms on the floor, elbows under shoulders.
2. Step your feet back into a straight line.
3. Squeeze your abs and glutes.
4. Hold, then rest.

⏱ 3 holds of 15 to 30 seconds

COACHING CUE Breathe steadily the whole time. Stop when your hips sag.

THE PLAN

Your 6-Week Walking Plan

Aim for 150 minutes of brisk activity a week. This gets you there without it feeling like a chore.

Build up gradually

Week 1	10 minutes easy walk, 4 days
Week 2	15 minutes, 4 days
Week 3	20 minutes, 5 days, some of it brisk
Week 4	25 minutes brisk, 5 days
Week 5	30 minutes brisk, 5 days
Week 6	30 minutes brisk, 5 days, plus a hill or a few faster bursts if you feel good

Make it stick

- ✓ Pick the same time each day. After a meal works well.
- ✓ Walk with a friend, a podcast or the dog.
- ✓ Count it: 7,000 to 10,000 steps a day is a good range.
- ✓ Miss a day? Just carry on. It's the trend that counts.

How hard?

- ✓ **Easy:** you can chat comfortably.
- ✓ **Brisk:** you can talk but not sing, and you're warm.
- ✓ **Too hard:** you can't speak in full sentences. Slow down.

> **Tip:** check your blood pressure at home each week and write it in the tracker. Watching it come down is a great motivator.

THE WEEK

A Simple Week and a 20-Minute Routine

No gym needed. This fits around work and family.

Example week

Monday	Brisk walk, 30 minutes
Tuesday	20-minute routine below
Wednesday	Walk, 30 minutes
Thursday	20-minute routine below
Friday	Brisk walk, 30 minutes
Saturday	Longer, easy walk or a bike ride
Sunday	Rest, or a gentle stroll

The 20-minute routine (do it twice a week)

Sit-to-stand	2 sets of 8 to 10
Incline push-up	2 sets of 8 to 10
Step-up	2 sets of 8 each leg
Wall sit	3 holds of 20 to 30 seconds
Plank	2 holds of 15 to 20 seconds

Rules of thumb: rest 45 to 60 seconds between moves, breathe out on the effort, and start with one set if you've been inactive. Want to go further? Once your pressure is controlled, ask me for a plan built around you.

TRACK IT

My Blood Pressure Diary

Take two readings, one minute apart, morning and evening. Bring this to your appointment.

	Morning 1	Morning 2	Evening 1	Evening 2	Notes
Day 1					
Day 2					
Day 3					
Day 4					
Day 5					
Day 6					
Day 7					
Day 8					
Day 9					
Day 10					
Day 11					
Day 12					
Day 13					
Day 14					

Questions for my GP: What is my average? Do I need any tests? What target should I aim for? Is my medication right for me? What exercise is safe for me?

MYTHS AND FACTS

What You've Heard, and What's True

I'd feel it if my blood pressure was high	Most people feel nothing at all. That's why it's called the silent killer. Only a check will tell you.
It's an older man's problem	It becomes more common with age, but plenty of men find out in their 40s, and younger men often have it without knowing.
One normal reading means I'm fine	Pressure changes through the day and over the years. Check regularly.
If I'm fit and slim, I'm safe	Fitness helps a lot, but family history, salt, alcohol and stress all matter, and fit people can have high readings too.
Once my numbers are good, I can stop the tablets	If tablets are controlling your pressure, stopping brings it back. Only change medication with your doctor.
Exercise is dangerous if you have high blood pressure	Regular exercise lowers it. Just keep breathing, build up gradually and check with your GP if your pressure is very high or uncontrolled.
Low blood pressure is always a problem	Many healthy people run low and feel great. It's only a concern with symptoms.

QUICK ANSWERS

Your Questions Answered

Is this just a men's issue?

No. It affects women too, and the risk rises after menopause. This guide is written with men over 40 in mind, but everything here applies to women as well.

Can I get it down without tablets?

Many people can bring mildly raised pressure down with food, weight, alcohol, activity and sleep. If your doctor recommends tablets, take them. They work best alongside the lifestyle changes.

How long until I see a change?

Exercise and diet changes often show up within 4 to 12 weeks. Track it at home to see.

Is a home monitor accurate enough?

A validated upper-arm monitor, used properly, is. Take it to your surgery once so they can compare it.

Does being fit protect me?

It helps enormously, but it doesn't make you immune. Get checked.

Where's my nearest free check?

Ask at your local pharmacy. If you're 40 or over in England, most offer one.

Sources: NHS, British Heart Foundation, Blood Pressure UK, Office for National Statistics, and Edwards et al., British Journal of Sports Medicine, 2023. General information, not medical advice.

THE NMG GUIDE

Want help getting started?

Get checked this week, then message me. I'll build the walking, strength and food around you and your readings, with your doctor's advice as the foundation.

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REAL COACHING. REAL RESULTS.