
NWL kidney clinic

A guide to understanding your blood pressure and how to take your own measurements at home

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet provides information on high blood pressure and how you can measure your blood pressure at home. If you have any questions about the information below, please speak to a member of your clinical team.

What is blood pressure and why is it important?

Your heart pumps blood around your body through blood vessels called arteries. Arteries carry your blood from your heart to your brain and the rest of your body. Your blood pressure is the force your heart uses to pump the blood to keep the blood moving. Therefore, blood pressure is the pressure of blood in your arteries.

What is high blood pressure and why is this a problem for my kidneys?

High blood pressure is also known as hypertension. It means your blood pressure is consistently too high and that your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body. This high pressure of blood can cause damage to the arteries, including those that supply your kidneys. This can lead to kidney failure and the need for a transplant or dialysis. In fact, the most important thing you can do for your kidneys is to keep your blood pressure under control because, if your blood pressure is too high, your kidneys can get worse much more quickly. High blood pressure can also increase your chance of having a heart attack or stroke.

How can you tell if you have high blood pressure?

Having high blood pressure is not usually something that you feel or notice. Most people have no signs or symptoms. The only way to know what your blood pressure is, is to have it measured.

What do the numbers mean?

Every blood pressure reading consists of two numbers or levels. They are shown as one number on top of the other, e.g. 120/80. The top number (systolic) is the pressure in the arteries when the heart contracts. The bottom number (diastolic) is the pressure in the arteries when the heart rests between each heartbeat.

What can I do to keep my blood pressure lower?

Here are some important ways you can help reduce your blood pressure:

- reduce the salt in your diet
- give up smoking
- maintain a healthy weight
- take regular exercise
- keep your alcohol intake within government guidelines
- take your blood pressure tablets as prescribed

Most people with kidney disease will need tablets to keep their blood pressure controlled. There are many types of medication available and your doctor will discuss with you which type may suit you best. It is likely that you will need to take these tablets for the rest of your life.

Can I measure my own blood pressure at home?

Monitoring your blood pressure at home can be a really useful way of seeing what your blood pressure is like in your daily life, particularly if you get anxious when you visit the hospital or GP surgery. To get accurate readings, it is important to use the right monitor and the right technique.

You should choose a monitor that has been recommended, this means that it has been through a series of tests and has been shown to give accurate readings. You can find a list of monitors on the Blood Pressure UK website, (www.bloodpressureuk.org) or the British Hypertensive Society, <http://bhsoc.org>.

Alternatively, you can ask your pharmacist to recommend a suitable machine.

Remember:

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 - Sit up straight
 - Place both feet on the floor
 - Whilst taking the reading, try to keep still and do not talk

The illustration shows a person sitting at a table, viewed from the side. They are wearing a blue blood pressure cuff on their left upper arm. A dashed blue line indicates the cuff is positioned at heart level. The person's feet are flat on the floor, and they are sitting upright. The table is blue and has two legs visible.

- It would be helpful to see what your blood pressure is like in daily life. A week before your clinic appointment, please record your blood pressure readings in the table on the next page and bring this leaflet with you.**

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How do I make a comment or suggestion?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any suggestions or comments, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 020 3313 0088 (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or 020 3312 7777 (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: 020 3312 1337 / 1349

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

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