

Lower Blood Pressure is Better

Final results from a long term study known as the Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial, where patients with hypertension and cardiovascular risk were divided into two groups, showed that the lower blood pressure group significantly reduced the risk of heart disease, stroke and death from these diseases. Both groups were provided with antihypertensive drugs. One group had a controlled blood pressure at 140 mmHg and the other group controlled at 120mmHg.

In Australia, the definition of high blood pressure (hypertension) has been pressure in excess of 140/90 mmHg. A recent Government initiative to GPs aims to have the population cohort reach 130/80 mmHg.

Whilst most people in Australia have had their blood pressure measured, I was interested to read that the condition was uncontrolled or unmanaged in 20 to 25% of the population.



For most people, the cause of high blood pressure is not known. This is known as 'essential' or 'primary' hypertension. But while the cause is not known, it is clear that various conditions and behaviours make high blood pressure more likely. These are known as risk factors, and include:

- leading a sedentary lifestyle
- a family history of high blood pressure
- a diet with high salt intake
- high blood cholesterol
- smoking
- being overweight
- narrowing of the arteries
- high alcohol consumption

Those of us with controlled hypertension, and under the care of prescribing doctors, have a number of drugs with proven antihypertensive properties from which to choose. A blood pressure test is usually the first event to take place in the doctor's room and if high (white coat effect) another test is taken some minutes later and then maybe another until satisfied that it is satisfactory, or another drug is tried with the aim of reducing the systolic reading to 130mmHg.

Whilst the antihypertensive drugs are mostly effective in reducing high blood pressure there are patients with unresponsive high blood pressure usually associated with high blood cholesterol for which there are anticholesterol drugs such as the statins. However, there are some foods that are known to be antihypertensive in a limited way. These are:

Chocolate Many studies show that cocoa products can reduce blood pressure. An Australian analysis of 13 randomised studies concluded that **dark chocolate** is more effective than a placebo in lowering blood pressure.

Olive Oil A study in Spain involving more than 6,000 participants, with at least two years follow up, showed that blood pressure was up to 75 percent lower for those using more olive oil compared with those using the least.

Beets lower blood pressure significantly thanks to high levels of dietary nitrates that dilate the arteries.

Garlic In an analysis of seven randomised, placebo controlled trials, researchers found a significant blood pressure lowering effect.