

Hypertension – high blood pressure

Children with weight problems are more at risk of high blood pressure. It is therefore important to check blood pressure on a regular basis. Your child's blood pressure will be measured each time they are seen by the doctor.

What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, happens when the heart pumps too hard and causes increased blood flow. The blood then pushes against the walls of the blood vessels making them stretch beyond their normal limit. The longer that high blood pressure goes untreated the more damage it can cause to the heart, kidneys, eyes and brain.

Measuring blood pressure

Measuring blood pressure (BP) is quick and easy by placing an appropriate sized cuff around the arm and recording numbers from a machine. In children, these numbers are then compared to a chart based on sex, age and height.

If the BP reading is high, a 24 hour recording may be ordered using a portable BP device. The BP cuff is worn by the patient for 24 hours and BP recordings are done throughout an allocated time period. These readings are then downloaded and interpreted by the doctor.

Depending on the results, the doctor may wish to order a blood test to see if there is any damage to organs or refer to a specialist doctor for further investigations and management.

Symptoms

There are no clear symptoms that alert to having hypertension. An early warning sign can be the raised blood pressure readings. That is why it's important to get regular check-ups of blood pressure. Obesity, family history of high BP, diabetes, sleep apnoea as well as other sleep disorders put you at risk of developing hypertension.

Treatment

The most effective way of reducing a high BP is through weight loss, regular daily exercise and reducing the amount of sodium in the diet, however sometimes medication is also required.

Daily aerobic exercise where your cheeks are red and you are puffing will help lower your BP by making heart muscle stronger. A strong heart can pump more blood with less effort therefore reducing the pressure inside the arteries.

Sodium is found in almost every food we eat as sodium chloride or 'salt', but the amount varies greatly. About 75% of the salt we eat comes from processed foods such as salty



snack foods, some packaged foods and takeaways. It is important to always read the nutrition information panel on the label to check whether it is a high salt food or not.

To read the nutrition information panel, always look in the per 100g column and aim to only buy foods with less than 400mg of sodium per 100g. Eating salty foods and adding salt during cooking or at the table encourages a taste for salty foods, so that healthy meals may seem tasteless in comparison. Therefore, it is highly important to limit salt intake for children whose tastes are being trained for life.

The Healthy Weight team will provide healthy lifestyle information that may be helpful in preventing and managing high blood pressure.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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