

Deciding what to do about high blood pressure

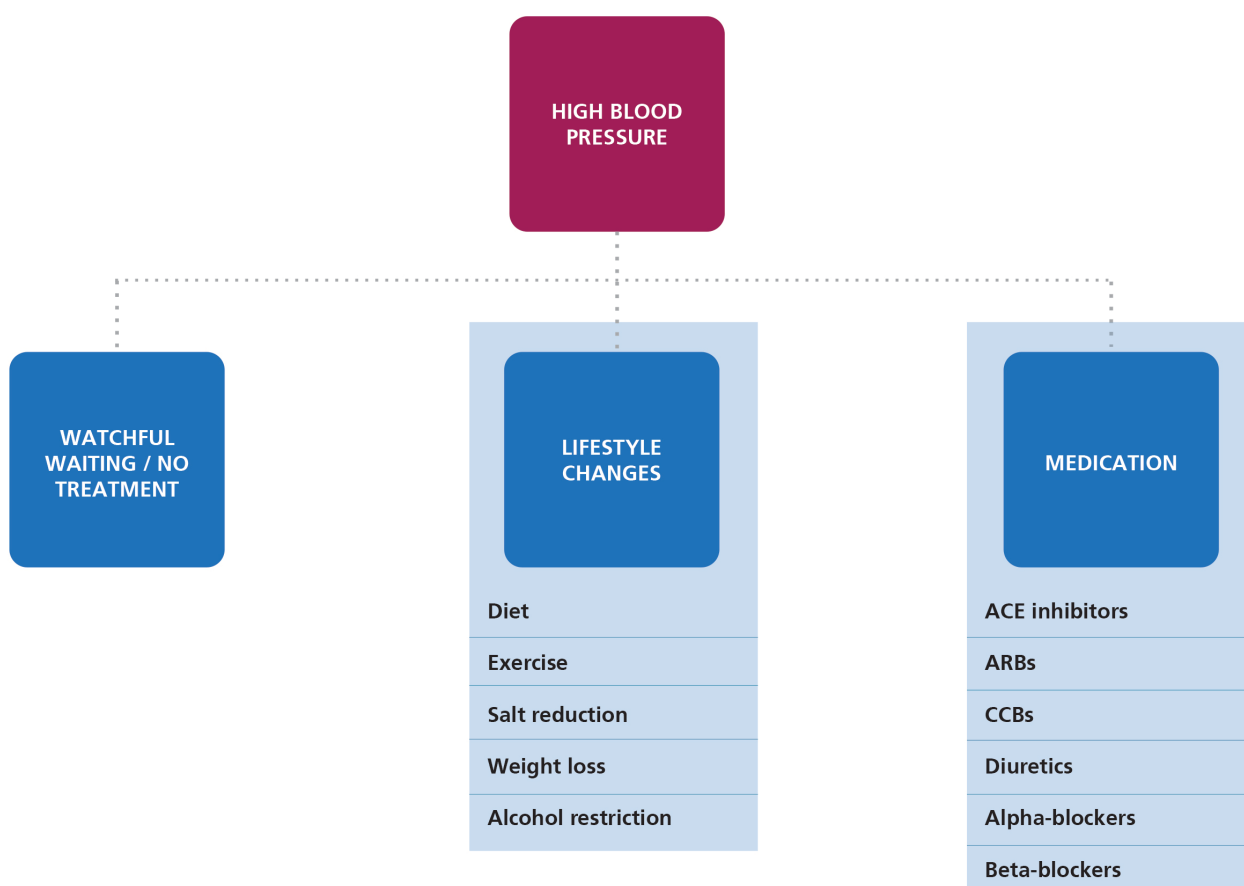
This short decision aid is intended to help people with high blood pressure decide which treatment, or treatments, might best help reduce their chance of heart and circulation problems. You can use it on your own, or with your doctor, to help you make a decision about what's right for you at this time.

This decision aid is for adults who have been told by a doctor that they have high blood pressure.

This decision aid is only for people with high blood pressure who have not had a heart attack or stroke, who are not pregnant, and who do not have diabetes.

The main options for treatment are:

- **No treatment.** This means not having any treatment for high blood pressure at this time. You may decide to have treatment at a later time.
- **Lifestyle changes.** This means making changes to help bring blood pressure down, such as trying to lose weight, exercising regularly, and changing your diet.
- **Medicines.** This means taking one or more types of drug to try to bring blood pressure down.



What are my options?

	No treatment	Lifestyle changes	Drug treatments
What is the treatment?	No treatment for high blood pressure means you decide not to make any lifestyle changes or take any medicines to lower your blood pressure. Instead, you and your doctor may regularly measure your blood pressure to check it has not risen to a dangerously high level.	Lifestyle changes to reduce blood pressure are a range of things that you can do to help bring your blood pressure down. Your nurse or GP can help you find appropriate lifestyle changes that can help reduce your blood pressure. This short decision aid will focus on the effects of lifestyle changes that we're fairly sure can help bring down blood pressure. These include changing your diet, getting regular physical exercise, cutting down the amount of salt in your diet, losing weight if you are overweight, and cutting down the amount of alcohol you drink.	Drug treatments for high blood pressure are medicines that you take to help lower your blood pressure. These include ACE inhibitors, angiotensin receptor blockers, calcium channel blockers, diuretics, beta-blockers, and alpha-blockers. You may need to take more than one medicine to bring your blood pressure down. Most people need at least two drugs. Which kinds of drug work best depends on your age and your ethnic background.[1]

	No treatment	Lifestyle changes	Drug treatments
What is the effect on your blood pressure?	Without treatment, it's likely that blood pressure will continue to rise. Not having treatment can make it harder to lower blood pressure if people decide to have treatment later on. [2]	Making lifestyle changes can lower blood pressure. Making changes such as getting regular exercise, losing weight if you are overweight, sticking to a healthy diet, and reducing the amount of alcohol and salt in your diet, can lower blood pressure. [3]	Taking medical treatments can lower blood pressure and keep it down. Drugs called diuretics, ACE inhibitors, angiotensin receptor blockers, calcium channel blockers, alpha-blockers, and beta-blockers can all lower blood pressure. [4]

	No treatment	Lifestyle changes	Drug treatments
What is the effect on how long you are likely to live?	Without treatment, it's likely that blood pressure will continue to rise. This can affect how long people with high blood pressure are likely to live. The average person in England's risk of dying from heart disease or stroke increases with every 2 mmHg rise in systolic blood pressure. [5]	Making changes to lifestyle to lower blood pressure could help people with high blood pressure live longer. For example, getting any amount of regular physical exercise can reduce the chance of dying early, of heart disease or of any other cause. [6]	Taking medical treatments to lower blood pressure can help people with high blood pressure live longer.[7] Taking drug treatments for high blood pressure can reduce the chance of dying early, of heart disease or of any other cause.[8]

	No treatment	Lifestyle changes	Drug treatments
What is the effect on your risk of heart problems?	High blood pressure that is not treated is more likely to damage blood vessels than high blood pressure that is treated. This can lead to heart problems such as a heart attack or heart failure.[9]	We don't know if making lifestyle changes to lower blood pressure can reduce the chances of heart problems. There aren't many studies that have looked into this.	<p>Taking medical treatments to lower blood pressure can reduce the chances of having heart problems caused by high blood pressure, such as a heart attack.</p> <p>Over five years, around 40 in 1,000 people who take drug treatments for high blood pressure will have heart diseases. Around 45 in 1,000 people who don't take drug treatments will have heart diseases.[10]</p>

	No treatment	Lifestyle changes	Drug treatments
What is the effect on your chances of a stroke?	High blood pressure that is not treated is more likely to damage blood vessels than high blood pressure that is treated. This can lead to a stroke.[11]	We don't know if making lifestyle changes to lower blood pressure can reduce the chances of having a stroke. There aren't many studies that have looked into this.	<p>Taking medical treatments to lower blood pressure can reduce the chances of having a stroke.</p> <p>Over five years, around 17 in 1,000 people who take drug treatments for high blood pressure will have a stroke. Around 27 in 1,000 people who don't take drug treatments will have a stroke. [12]</p> <p>Taking some drugs can reduce the risk of having a stroke more than others, when compared with taking a dummy pill.[13]</p>

	No treatment	Lifestyle changes	Drug treatments
What is the effect of treatment on your life?	<p>People who decide not to have treatment for high blood pressure don't usually have to spend any time having treatment.</p> <p>Without treatment, blood pressure may continue to rise, and this may cause symptoms and health problems that affect people's life, ability to work, and the decisions they can make.</p>	<p>People who decide to make lifestyle changes to lower blood pressure may need to make time to exercise regularly.</p> <p>Adjusting a diet, for example by cutting down on salt (to less than 6 grams a day) and alcohol (to 2-4 units a day), may mean having to buy and prepare different foods.</p> <p>People who make these kinds of lifestyle changes probably won't have to spend any time in hospital.</p>	<p>People who decide to take medical treatments to lower blood pressure have to take tablets.</p> <p>How many times a day people take tablets varies, from once to several times a day, depending on which and how many drugs they need to take. Most people take more than one type of tablet for high blood pressure.</p> <p>Medical treatments can be prescribed by a GP. People who take drug treatments won't usually have to spend any time in hospital.</p>

	No treatment	Lifestyle changes	Drug treatments
What side effects or complications does this treatment have?	<p>People who decide not to have treatment won't have any side effects or complications.</p> <p>Without treatment, it's likely that blood pressure will continue to rise. This may make it harder to lower blood pressure if people decide to have treatment later on. It may also cause damage to blood vessels and organs, such as the kidneys.[14]</p>	<p>Making lifestyle changes to lower blood pressure is unlikely to cause side effects or complications.</p> <p>Physical activity can cause injuries like muscle strains.</p> <p>Some people may get diarrhoea or feel bloated as a result of eating a low-fat diet that includes lots of fruit and vegetables.</p> <p>People who reduce the amount of salt in their diet to a very low amount (less than 1 gram a day) may get muscle cramps, diarrhoea, and vomiting.[15] Restricting salt intake by this much is not recommended.</p>	<p>Taking medical treatments to lower blood pressure can cause side effects and complications.</p> <p>Between 72 and 144 people in 1,000 who take drug treatments for high blood pressure get side effects that stop them from carrying on taking their treatments.</p> <p>Different drugs can cause different unwanted effects.</p> <p>Some of the most common are dizziness, a cough, swollen ankles, gout (a build up of a substance called uric acid in the bloodstream and joints), and erection problems in men.</p>

What are the pros and cons of each option?

People with high blood pressure have different experiences about the health problem and views on treatment. Choosing the treatment option that is best for the patient means considering how the consequences of each treatment option will affect their life.

Here are some questions people may want to consider about treatment for high blood pressure:

- Do they want to reduce their risk of heart diseases and other health problems related to high blood pressure?
- Do they want a treatment that increases the chances they'll live for longer?
- Do they want to avoid their blood pressure continuing to rise?
- Are they willing to make changes to lifestyle or diet to reduce their blood pressure?
- Are they willing to take medical treatments for their high blood pressure?
- How important is it that a treatment improves their quality of life?
- Are they willing to take the risk of complications or side effects from treatment?