# He taonga | A treasure

# He kõrero whakataki mõ te pēhanga toto

## Introduction to blood pressure

High blood pressure (BP) is a leading cause of stroke. Healthy blood pressure not only protects your brain, it also helps protect your heart, eyes, and kidneys. The great news is that high BP can be lowered by making simple lifestyle changes and if necessary, taking medication. Here we explain what BP is, how to understand BP readings, and what you can do to lower high BP.

### He ah<mark>a te pēhanga toto?</mark>

### What is BP?

BP is the pressure on the walls of your blood vessels caused by blood being pumped around your body. Your blood pressure naturally goes up and down throughout the day. Normal blood pressure is around 120/80 or lower (said as 'one twenty over eighty'). The first number is your systolic blood pressure, which is the pressure on the walls of your arteries when your heart is beating. The second number is the diastolic blood pressure, which is the pressure on the walls of your arteries when your heart is resting between beats.

### He aha te mate pēhanga toto?

### What is high BP?

High BP (hypertension) is when your BP consistently measures 130/80 or higher. High BP is usually diagnosed by a doctor who will take at least three readings over a period of a few months. High BP often has no signs or symptoms so the only way to know if you have it, is to get a regular check.

If your doctor diagnoses you with high BP, they may start you on medication to lower it. It is important that you take this medication as prescribed and don't stop taking it unless advised by your doctor.



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### NEXT PAGE: How to look after blood pressure

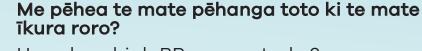
#### What is blood pressure?



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### What causes high BP?

- Getting older
- A family history of high blood pressure
- Having diabetes
- Eating too much salt and processed foods
- Not being physically active
- Being overweight
- Drinking too much alcohol, too often
- Smoking or vaping of nicotine
- Living with long-term stress
- Drinking too much caffeine (e.g., coffee and energy drinks)
- Not getting enough sleep



How does high BP cause stroke?

High BP puts strain on the blood vessels throughout your body, including the ones in your brain, causing them to harden and narrow. This means that the blood vessels in the brain are more likely to burst or become blocked and cause a stroke.

# He aha te ara tika kia toto rere pai, he tohu ora?

### How can you maintain a healthy BP?

The good news is that there is a lot you can do to keep your BP healthy. Here are some tips:

- Get your BP check at least once a year or as advised by your doctor
- Eat mostly 'whole foods' which are low in salt, sugar and saturated fat

Fruit, vegetables, oats, pasta, rice, legumes (e.g. chickpeas, lentils and red kidney beans), eggs, fish, chicken, lean meat, unsalted nuts, milk and yoghurt.

• Eat less salt and processed kai

Use herbs, spices, and lemon juice as alternatives to salt. Reduce takeaways and processed foods (e.g. bacon, sausages, corned beef, instant noodles).

Move more

Walking, gardening, dancing, swimming, cycling, collect kaimoana (seafood), kapa haka, doing housework, and using the stairs are some examples.

- Be smokefree
- Keep alcohol intake low

At least two alcohol free days a week. Avoid binge drinking.

• Get plenty of sleep and manage stress

Make sure you are getting between 7-9 hours of sleep daily and are managing stress levels with regular exercise, and by finding time to do the things you enjoy, such as reading, or listening to music.

• Reduce caffeine

Aim for no more than the equivalent of four cups of coffee per day. Avoid energy drinks.

### Hei aha ngā rongoā?

#### What about medication?

Your doctor may suggest that you take medication to lower your BP. If your doctor prescribes this medication, it is important that you take it as directed and continue to take your medication unless advised by your doctor.



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### Keep you and your whanau healthy and strong!

### Me pēhea taku pēhanga toto e aroturuki?

### How do I monitor my BP?

Getting your BP checked is simple, painless and can be done by your doctor or nurse, and at many pharmacies. If you're based in the North Island, you can also get your BP tested for free by visiting one of the Stroke Foundation's BP check vans. For more details, visit <u>www.stroke.</u> <u>org.nz/big-blood-pressure-check-vans</u>

If you have a family history of high blood pressure or have had a raised result in the past, it is a good idea to keep a record of your BP numbers to show your doctor. You can use the template provided below.

If you are monitoring your BP at home using your own blood pressure monitor, try and take it at the same time every day. First thing in the morning is a good time as you are more likely to be well rested. Sit quietly for five minutes before you check your BP. If it is a little high, sit quietly for another five minutes and take it again. You can compare your BP against our BP table here:

DATE	TIME	SYSTOLIC/ DIASTOLIC	COMMENTS
EXAMPLE 16/12	9.30am	125/79	No caffeine, after 20-minute rest
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You should also talk to your doctor about having a more thorough cardiovascular risk assessment to calculate your risk of having a stroke or heart attack.



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