

## **Lower Your Pressure, Improve Your Heart Health:** **Blood Pressure and Your Heart**

### **What is blood pressure?**

Blood pressure measures how hard your heart has to work to pump your blood. The first number in your blood pressure is the pressure from when the heart squeezes, or contracts, and the second number is the pressure when your heart relaxes. A normal blood pressure is 120/80.



Over half of adults in Ireland over the age of 45 have high blood pressure. Most adults are not being treated for high blood pressure, because high blood pressure has no symptoms. This is a problem because high blood pressure is bad for your heart, and is even called a “silent killer” because you don’t know when you have it. High blood pressure can cause:

- Damage to your arteries,
- Heart attack,
- Build-up of fat in your heart, and
- Heart failure.

If your blood pressure is higher than 140/90, you need to discuss it with your GP. Make sure to regularly check your blood pressure.

### **How do I measure my blood pressure?**

To find out your blood pressure, you must have it measured. Your GP can measure your blood pressure for you, and pharmacists at some local pharmacies can measure your blood pressure.

If your blood pressure is more than 140/90, your GP may want to monitor your blood pressure for 24 hours with a small cuff on your arm. Many pharmacies will also do 24 hour monitoring.

You can also check your own blood pressure at home with a blood pressure cuff that you can buy at a pharmacy. Your GP or local pharmacist can demonstrate how to measure your blood pressure correctly. Blood pressure can be raised for a short period of time by caffeine, stress, smoking, and exercise. Avoid those things before you take your blood pressure at home.

### **What other health problems are related to high blood pressure?**

High blood pressure is often linked to high blood pressure and diabetes. If you have high blood pressure, make sure that you get your cholesterol checked. Also, if you have both high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels, your risk of having a heart attack in the future is even greater.

Most people with Type 2 diabetes also have high blood pressure. It is extremely important to monitor your blood pressure if you have diabetes because having both diabetes and high blood pressure also makes you at greater risk of heart attack.

### **What do I do if I have high blood pressure?**

High blood pressure is linked to being overweight, old age, drinking too much alcohol, and eating too much salt (sodium). If you have blood pressure that is too high, it may help to:

- Be more active,
- Get to a healthy weight,
- Stop smoking,
- Eat fruits and vegetables,
- Eat foods low in fat and salt, and
- Refrain from drinking too much alcohol.

High blood pressure can run in families. If your parents or close family members have had high blood pressure, it is important that you get your blood pressure checked regularly.