



My Story, My Advice

With **helpful tips** and useful **information**,
including a **blood pressure diary**



Real Life Patient Stories –

Living with
high blood
pressure

PATIENT NAME:

Contents

Pages

About this booklet	1
Know your risks as the first step to avoid a heart attack	2
<i>“I needed to change my lifestyle before it killed me”</i>	3
Family history and high blood pressure	4
<i>“I am now 52 and I don’t want to die”</i>	5
Workplace stress and your heart	6
<i>“I love my social life, I don’t want to have a heart attack”</i>	7
Know the symptoms of a heart attack	8
<i>“Don’t let a heart attack be the first symptom!”</i>	9
Healthy Eating for Your Heart	10
<i>“My goal is to beat this high blood pressure”</i>	11
Lower your BP by staying physically active during the pandemic	12
<i>“Continuity of care to manage my blood pressure”</i>	13
Home blood pressure diary	14–17
Useful links for your heart health	18

About this booklet

My Story, My Advice is an educational booklet for adults living with **high blood pressure** or those who have a family history of high blood pressure.

This material is based on the real life stories of six Australians living with high blood pressure and their advice for healthy living to help prevent occurrences of heart attack or stroke.

Servier is proud to co-create and produce this material together **with patients and for patients.**

High blood pressure¹

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing on the walls of the blood vessels. When this force, or pressure, is too high, the heart has to pump harder and the blood vessels are put under greater strain as they carry blood.

High blood pressure is when your blood pressure is permanently higher than normal. High blood pressure is one of the main risk factors of heart attacks and strokes. You may not feel any symptoms from high blood pressure, so it’s important to get regular blood pressure checks. You can have your blood pressure measured by a doctor, a nurse, a pharmacist, or at home (with a validated machine).

The following figures are a useful guide². The top number is the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart pumps and the bottom number is the pressure when the heart relaxes.

Top Number mmHg	Bottom number mmHg	Meaning
≤ 120	≤ 80	Normal
121–139	81–89	High-normal
≥ 140	≥ 90	High blood pressure

Helpful tips and useful information

Know your risks as the first step to avoid a heart attack^{3,4}

Risks you can't change

- Age (>45yr)
- Gender (male)
- Ethnic background (Aboriginal/Torres Strait islanders, people from Indian sub-continent)
- Family history (heart attacks in siblings, parents and grandparents)

Risk factors you can change by adopting a healthy lifestyle and/or taking appropriate medications

- Conditions like high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, being overweight and type 2 diabetes
- Risky behavior like smoking, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity
- Others include stress, depression and social isolation
- See your GP for a heart health check

For more information, go to:

heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/know-your-risks/heart-health-check



See your
GP for a heart
health check

Almost 13 million
Australian adults have
three or more risk factors
for heart disease

"I needed to change my lifestyle before it killed me"

Jonas* is over 70 years of age and retired. He is an ex-smoker and was a moderate drinker. He had a heart attack at 58 at work, and had a triple bypass open heart surgery a few months later.



He didn't realise that his blood pressure was high. The heart surgeon put him on blood pressure lowering medications. Jonas attributed his heart attack to his high flying stressful lifestyle as an airline executive.

The heart attack and the heart surgery changed Jonas' life forever. His wife, Anne*, described it as a very frightening experience and she felt blown away by it.

Jonas changed his lifestyle. He took a redundancy package from his work and he hasn't worked since. He said **"I needed to change my lifestyle before it killed me."**

He walks 2.5 km every morning, cooks more at home, follows the Mediterranean diet, and limits alcohol to social events only. He also enjoys an active social life.

He regularly sees his GP and heart surgeon. He has been doing home blood pressure monitoring 2 to 3 times a week. He is on blood pressure medication, aspirin and a cholesterol lowering drug. His heart surgeon attributed his quick recovery to him stopping smoking at the age of 41 and maintaining good general health after the operation.

Anne said since Jonas' heart attack and surgery, **"we do everything together."** He has managed to overcome his fear of another heart attack with the support of his loving wife and children, by adopting a healthy lifestyle and by taking his medications regularly.

Helpful tips and useful information

Family history and high blood pressure^{5,6}

What is a family history of high blood pressure and why is it important?

It means you have someone in your family (a blood relative such as a mother, father, sister, or brother) who developed high blood pressure before the age of 60.

You have two times the risk of having high blood pressure if one or more close family members had high blood pressure before 60. It has been linked to other risk factors such as high cholesterol, high body fat, and being more sensitive to the effects of salt on raising high blood pressure.

What can you DO if you have a family history of high blood pressure?

1. Get your heart health checked at least once a year if you're over 45, or over 30 if you're of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent⁶
2. Reduce other risks for high blood pressure by eating healthy foods, using less salt, exercising, losing weight if needed and stopping smoking.
3. If you are already on blood pressure lowering medications, it is important to take them regularly as prescribed by your doctor.
4. Finding the best treatment for each person often takes time. It is important that you keep trying to lower your blood pressure with the help of your doctor.



“I am now 52 and I don't want to die”

Maggie* was diagnosed with high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes in her early 30s.



She was put on blood pressure lowering medication and managed her blood sugar levels through diet, exercise and hiring a personal trainer at a local gym. All was well until 6 years later when she had some major surgery.

Her blood pressure went up and became difficult to control. Her doctor switched her to another blood pressure lowering drug and over the next six years she developed worsening joint pain, lethargy and eventually debilitating leg cramps. In 2017 she was also put on blood sugar lowering medication.

A few months ago, Maggie had finally made the connection that the side effects were due to the blood pressure lowering medication and went back to her GP again. She was switched to yet another blood pressure medication. The side effects stopped but her blood pressure went up again. She became increasingly worried, frustrated and short-tempered.

“I'm now 52 and I don't want to die” she said through tears. Her grandparents, father, aunts, and uncles have all suffered from high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease, with some passing away due to these conditions.

Maggie has been on antidepressant medication for depression since 2006.

Maggie went back to see her GP recently. Her GP prescribed another blood pressure medication on top of the one she had been taking. Her blood pressure dropped to normal and she is now happy and extremely relieved.

Helpful tips and useful information

Workplace stress and your heart^{7,8}

Workplace stress is linked with high risk of coronary heart disease and more so among employees aged under 50 years.

Workplace stress may lead to unhealthy habits, such as overeating, smoking and drinking too much alcohol. This may lead you to not finding the time or the energy to be more physically active.

Some tips for managing work stress include⁸:

- Limit working extra hours
- Take regular breaks including lunch breaks and go for a walk
- Get the balance right so you continue to contribute in your work role and allow time for important people and interests in your personal life
- Learn to relax with deep diaphragmatic breathing and mindfulness exercises
- Learn to say 'no' politely and don't let yourself be overwhelmed by new challenges
- Allocate time to do some relaxing activities you might enjoy, such as exercising, reading, gardening or listening to music



"I love my social life, I don't want to have a heart attack"

Jen* is a 65+ years of age part-retiree who lives alone. She describes herself as a workaholic who has lived a highly stressful and sociable lifestyle. A chain smoker since her teens, and still smoking some cigarettes, Jen also enjoys a glass or two of wine most days.



Jen discovered she had high blood pressure 15 years ago when she visited her GP. She felt exhausted and stressed. Her blood pressure was 180/120 mmHg. She decided not to take medications for her high blood pressure and chose to manage her stress with yoga, deep breathing, meditation and massage therapy. Her blood pressure came down to 120/80 mmHg.

She had another spike in blood pressure several years ago which she felt was caused by stress at work. She continued with her self-management methods as described above and again, chose not to take any blood pressure lowering medication. She also took some time off work to reduce stress.

However, in mid 2017, she developed chest pains at work and was rushed to have an ECG[^], which was normal. Her GP referred her to a heart specialist who saw her immediately and arranged an angiogram^{**} which showed no blockage in heart blood vessels. But the specialist discovered her heart was enlarged and diagnosed her with cardiomyopathy. Her blood pressure was high. She was prescribed blood pressure lowering medications and a cholesterol lowering drug. She was told she needs to take these drugs for the rest of her life to reduce her risk of heart attack. Jen's adherence to her medications has been good. She has also been taking Vitamin D and B every morning for many years. It serves as a trigger for her to take her heart and blood pressure medications every morning. But her main motivation for taking her medicines regularly is the fear of a heart attack. She still enjoys her highly active social life so much.

^{*}Name changed. Stock image shown.

[^]An electrocardiogram (ECG) is a simple test that can be used to check your heart's rhythm and electrical activity.

^{**}An angiogram is a procedure that uses x-ray and special dye to take pictures of your blood vessels.

Helpful tips and useful information

Know the symptoms of a heart attack⁹

A heart attack occurs when a heart blood vessel becomes blocked, and reduces blood flow and the amount of oxygen that gets to your heart.

Here are the most common symptoms of a heart attack. You may have one, or a combination:

- Chest discomfort or pain. This can feel like uncomfortable heaviness, tightness, pressure or crushing sensation in your chest. This discomfort can spread to your arms, neck, jaw or back.
- Dizziness, light-headedness, feeling faint
- Nausea, indigestion, vomiting
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Sweating or a cold sweat.

If you feel any of the above symptoms, experts recommend the following steps:



1. Call:
000



2. Stop:
Rest immediately



3. Talk: Tell someone
how you feel



“Don’t let a heart attack be the first symptom!”

Jerry* was 50 when he had his heart attack while gardening with his son.

Jerry experienced sharp pains near his left shoulder followed by a tingling sensation down his left arm. He called for his wife, and asked her to call an ambulance. He recognised these symptoms of a heart attack from his first aid course at work. He laid down and closed his eyes and when he woke up he was in a hospital bed.



The heart specialist diagnosed him with high blood pressure. He had been fit and athletic as a younger man but had also smoked and regularly consumed alcohol. He was started on numerous medications, encouraged to stop smoking and to get back into exercise. He had always followed his dietician’s advice to eat a balanced diet.

In 2012, Jerry had 2 stents^s inserted due to blockages in his heart vessels discovered during a routine angiogram^{**}. This was followed a few months later by open heart surgery to replace his faulty heart valve.

Jerry is now in his mid 70s and routinely visits his GP of 25 years and also his heart specialist every 6 months. He reflects on his strong family history of heart problems. He lost both his parents, a brother and a sister to heart attacks.

He isn’t bothered by the fact that he is currently taking twelve medications everyday: these medications help to control his blood pressure and fluid retention as well as the subsequent diagnoses of type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol. Jerry has a very positive mindset. He follows his doctors’ advice and feels everything is well controlled at the moment.

*Name changed. Stock image shown.

^sA stent is a tiny tube that is inserted into a blocked blood vessel to keep it open.

^{**}An angiogram is a procedure that uses x-ray and special dye to take pictures of your blood vessels.

Helpful tips and useful information

Healthy Eating for Your Heart¹⁰

The Heart Foundation of Australia has recommended that you can improve your heart health by focusing on a few simple things:

- Plenty of fruit, vegetables and wholegrains
e.g. brown rice, oats, wholemeal/grainy bread.
- Variety of healthy protein sources including plant-based proteins like beans, chickpeas, lentils, nuts and seeds, fish and seafood, eggs and poultry.
- Choose unflavored milk, yoghurt and cheese.
- Healthy fats choices with nuts, seeds, avocados, olives and their oils for cooking.
- Herbs and spices to flavor foods instead of adding salt (or soy)
- Eating a variety of fresh and unprocessed foods

By following this simple principle, your diet will be high in the right nutrients like fibre, antioxidants and unsaturated fats, and low in harmful nutrients such as saturated and trans-fat, salt and sugar.

For further information on healthy eating, please visit the Heart Foundation website

heartfoundation.org.au/Heart-health-education/healthy-eating



“My goal is to beat this high blood pressure”

John* is a 49 year old male of Asian descent. He is married to a personal trainer and has two young children.

John was diagnosed with high blood pressure and high cholesterol four years ago. His blood pressure at the time was 169/95 mmHg. John’s mother, who also has high blood pressure and high cholesterol, had urged him to visit his GP to check his heart health as ‘these conditions run in the family’.



Despite his doctor recommending he start taking blood pressure lowering medication, John initially decided against it, as he believed he could lower his blood pressure by changing his lifestyle. He started exercising regularly, stopped smoking and reduced his alcohol intake. He ate less red meat, put less salt in his cooking and added more fibre to his diet. He even quit his job to lower his stress.

After a year of these lifestyle changes, John had lost 4 kg of body weight and his cholesterol levels had dropped, however his blood pressure was still high. His GP told him that he was at an increased risk of having a heart attack and should start taking medication to lower his blood pressure.

John’s fear of having a heart attack and leaving his young children without a father convinced him to start taking blood pressure lowering medication. Six months later, John’s blood pressure was still high, so his GP added a second blood pressure lowering drug. John continued with the lifestyle modifications. He used a script reminder app from his pharmacy to regularly fill his script. John monitors his blood pressure at home to make sure it stays well controlled and hopes to be able to beat his high blood pressure.

His main motivation to stay on treatment is to prevent a heart attack so that he can continue to look after his children.

Helpful tips and useful information

Lower your blood pressure by staying physically active during the pandemic^{11,12,13}

Regular physical activity makes your heart stronger. A stronger heart can pump more blood with less effort. If your heart can work less to pump, the force on your arteries decreases, lowering your BP.

Keeping physically active is vital for better heart health. Social distancing measures during the Covid-19 pandemic can limit the range of activities you can do. However, there are activities you can do at home or around your neighborhood;

- Houseworks, such as mowing the lawn, raking leaves, gardening or mopping the floor
- Climbing stairs, walking, jogging, cycling, and dancing
- **Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity** most days of the week (150 min each week).
- You can break it up into **three 10-minutes sessions of aerobic activity** and get the same benefit as one 30-minute session.
- Do **muscle-strengthening** activities on at least **2 days each week**.

If you don't currently get much exercise make sure you check with your doctor before you start.



“Continuity of care to manage my blood pressure”

Sally* used to live in Melbourne and had regular check-ups with her GP. Her blood pressure was described as high-normal for an extended period of time and the GP **“kept an eye on it”**.



In 2012, at the age of 47, Sally had a mini stroke[^] while on her way back home from work. **“I remember having a general unwell feeling not long after leaving work. The feeling got worse as I got closer to home and I became agitated. I do remember having a tingling feeling down my left side and also in my mouth. My husband said at the time this happened that I was trying to get out of the car, but I don't remember this.”** Her husband drove her straight to the hospital where she was kept under observation and subsequently discharged.

Sally saw her GP the next day and she was commenced on cholesterol lowering medication. Her blood pressure was still high-normal and she was recommended to make lifestyle changes such as weight loss and increased exercise.

Her family moved to Brisbane in early 2019 and she has seen three different GPs there. She was really happy with the second GP but the follow up was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The last GP she saw briefly, prescribed her a blood pressure lowering drug which she stopped taking after a week due to side effects. She continued with her cholesterol drug.

Sally knows she is a high risk of a stroke or heart attack. She desperately wants to have a face to face consultation with a GP to check her blood pressure and get it under control. **“I haven't been able to do that for one reason or another. I was really happy with the (second) GP I saw & I would love to continue seeing her when everything settles down.”**

Sally is considering getting a home blood pressure monitor as she knows how important it is to check her blood pressure regularly.

*Name changed. Stock image shown.

[^]Also known as a Transient Ischaemic Attack – when the blood supply to your brain is blocked temporarily; same signs as a stroke but only for a short time.



Home Blood Pressure Diary

My name:

My age:

My blood pressure goal: / mmHg

1. Only use validated machines. Finger and wrist devices are not recommended.
2. Use a cuff that fits the top half of your arm properly.
3. Take blood pressure measurement at around the same time in the morning or evening
4. Take it before eating, taking medication or vigorous exercise
5. Sit comfortably with both feet on the floor for 5 minutes (*no talking/distraction*)
6. Take two measurements one minute apart
7. Note down your blood pressure in this diary and show it to your GP at every visit.

Date	Time AM	Blood Pressure		Time PM	Blood Pressure		Notes (e.g. medication change, stressful day at work)
		Top number	Bottom number		Top number	Bottom number	

Date	Time AM	Blood Pressure		Time PM	Blood Pressure		Notes (e.g. medication change, stressful day at work)
		Top number	Bottom number		Top number	Bottom number	



Home Blood Pressure Diary

Date	Time AM	Blood Pressure		Time PM	Blood Pressure		Notes (e.g. medication change, stressful day at work)
		Top number	Bottom number		Top number	Bottom number	

Date	Time AM	Blood Pressure		Time PM	Blood Pressure		Notes (e.g. medication change, stressful day at work)
		Top number	Bottom number		Top number	Bottom number	

My Story, My Advice

With **helpful tips** and useful **information**

Useful links for your heart health (scan each QR code to access the link)

**Healthy Recipes
for Your Heart
Health**



**Exercise to Do
at Home during
COVID-19 Pandemic**



**Join Australia's
Largest Walking
Community**



**More Information on
Mini Stroke/Transient
Ischemic Attack**



**More Information
on Workplace
Stress**



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