

# Pfizer Australia HEALTH REPORT

ISSUE #29

## HEALTHY BLOOD PRESSURE

This edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report looks at managing blood pressure.

Uncontrolled high blood pressure (also known as hypertension) is a silent killer, with the symptoms almost undetectable by anyone but a healthcare professional.

It's vital that everyone has an understanding of what their blood pressure should be and if they have risk factors for hypertension.

Research conducted for this Health Report reveals that smokers are particularly at risk, being up to three times as likely not to know their blood pressure status, compared to non smokers (11 percent versus three percent).

Did you know smokers are also less aware than non-smokers of the lifestyle changes that can assist in managing high blood pressure, such as body weight, smoking and alcohol consumption? Smokers are more in the dark about the consequences of having uncontrolled blood pressure – like heart disease, kidney disease and death.

This month's Health Report partner is Kidney Health Australia, the leading not-for-profit national organisation working towards the promotion of kidney and urinary tract health.

Australian attitudes towards blood pressure were drawn from responses from 1,405 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in April 2006 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

The Pfizer Australia Health Report is produced monthly, in partnership with health consumer organisations and medical experts, and provides information and news that you and your family need to live a healthier, happier lifestyle.

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# UNDERSTANDING BLOOD PRESSURE



Your blood moves around your body through a network of blood vessels. Arteries are large blood vessels taking blood away from your heart and veins are smaller blood vessels returning blood to your heart. Blood pressure measures the force of blood against the walls of your blood vessels.

Not everyone's blood pressure is the same and it varies during the day as the demands of your body change. It is usually highest during exercise and lowest during sleep.

Fluid levels in your body also affect fluid levels in the blood vessels and alter your blood pressure. Emotions like anxiety, excitement or stress can have an impact on blood pressure too.

Blood pressure that remains high over time is called 'hypertension'. To confirm high blood pressure, readings must be taken on different days at different times.

Many people are unaware that they can have high blood pressure and feel perfectly well. Some people with high blood pressure get headaches, dizziness or nosebleeds but often there are no symptoms at all. The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have it checked regularly by your doctor.

Uncontrolled, high blood pressure makes your heart work harder and, over time, damages the walls of your blood vessels, including those in your major organs like the kidneys and brain. The very small vessels are often the first to be affected.

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for chronic kidney disease and cardiovascular disease such as coronary heart disease, stroke, heart failure, and peripheral vascular disease. Generally speaking, the risk increases the longer high blood pressure is left untreated.



# High blood pressure may be putting lives at risk

New research for this report reveals a lack of understanding of blood pressure has the potential to make it a silent killer.

The research found 77 percent of Australians are unaware that there are no symptoms for high blood pressure.

The research was conducted by medicines company Pfizer Australia and Kidney Health Australia.

Almost 45 percent of all Australians mistakenly think that symptoms do exist – when, in fact, they usually do not.

Kidney Health Australia CEO, Anne Wilson, says these findings reveal a lack of understanding in the community that may be putting lives at risk.

“Because high blood pressure usually produces no symptoms, most people don’t even realise they have it – and that can be dangerous, especially when it is a major risk factor for heart attacks, heart failure, strokes and even kidney disease,” she said.

“Everyone should have their blood pressure checked regularly, at least once a year if you are young and healthy, and more often if you



are not. Regular checks are the only way of monitoring for the condition.”

The research says that smokers are particularly at risk, being up to three times as likely not to know their blood pressure status, compared to non smokers (11 percent versus three percent).

“High blood pressure is a major community health issue which is significantly influenced by a number of lifestyle factors including weight, exercise, diet and whether you smoke

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This edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report was produced in partnership with Kidney Health Australia. Formerly The Australian Kidney Foundation, Kidney Health Australia was founded in 1968 as the leading not-for-profit national organisation working towards the promotion of kidney and urinary tract health.

Kidney Health Australia funds medical research and training; conducts both targeted and broad-based public awareness and education programs; pursues initiatives to improve patient services; provides a national Kidney Health Information Advisory Service; is involved in preventative medicine and health promotion projects; works closely with government and other agencies/organisations and; manages numerous fundraising programs. For information about kidney and urinary tract health, call the Kidney Health Info Line: 1800 682 531



# KIDNEYS AND BLOOD PRESSURE

Did you know that high blood pressure can cause chronic kidney disease and chronic kidney disease can cause high blood pressure?

If high blood pressure is left unchecked, the years of stress can thicken and narrow blood vessels and damage the kidneys' working units (the nephrons). This damage can cause salt and fluid retention, pushing blood pressure higher. High blood pressure reduces kidney function and may even result in kidney failure.

Your kidneys are a key player in maintaining healthy blood pressure. They produce hormones called renin and angiotensin, which help to control how well the blood vessels expand and contract. If your kidneys aren't working properly, hormone release increases, raising your blood pressure.

According to Kidney Health Australia, one-in-seven Australians have at least one sign of chronic kidney disease and don't know they have it. People with chronic kidney disease are 10-20 times more likely to have a heart attack and will die from cardiovascular disease before reaching kidney failure.

This makes it extremely important to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level and look after your kidneys. There are three easy ways to check your kidney health, ask your doctor for:

- A urine test for protein;
- A blood pressure test;
- A blood test for kidney function (eGFR).



## KNOW YOUR NUMBER

Knowing your blood pressure reading is an important part of self-managing your health. Most Australians have their blood pressure checked regularly but many of us don't really understand what those numbers mean.

Blood pressure readings come as two numbers e.g. 120/80. The top, larger number or 'systolic' reading indicates the pressure in the arteries as the heart pumps out blood. The second, smaller number or 'diastolic' reading is the blood pressure in the arteries when the heart relaxes between beats.

There are no fixed rules about what blood pressure is 'normal' but this a useful guide:

- Normal blood pressure: less than 120/80
- High Normal: 120-139/80-89
- High: more than 140/90

## Are you more at risk?

Some 30 percent of Australians aged 25 years and over have high blood pressure. (Source: *The Australian Diabetes, Obesity and Lifestyle Study*) Reasons for high blood pressure can vary but some people are more at risk.

The risk increases if you:

- Are older;
- Are male;
- Have a family history of high blood pressure;
- Are overweight;
- Smoke;
- Have a high cholesterol level;
- Over-use alcohol;
- Have a chronic condition like kidney disease or diabetes.

Certain medications such as birth control pills, decongestants and diet pills can also raise blood pressure.



The condition can sometimes be linked to a problem in an endocrine gland, such as the adrenal gland. These cases are fairly rare and can be cured by treatment. A healthcare team can give advice on these issues.

## DEADLY RISE OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

### ● Continued from page 3

or not. The fact that smokers are less informed than the rest of the population is of particular concern," added Ms Wilson.

Smokers are also less aware than non-smokers of the lifestyle changes that can assist in managing high blood pressure, such as body weight, smoking and alcohol consumption. They are less aware of the consequences of having uncontrolled blood pressure – like heart disease, kidney disease and death.

Some 60 percent of smokers were found to have little or no understanding of what blood pressure means compared to 43 percent of non-smokers.

Kidney Health Australia says the good news is that understanding of blood pressure seems to increase with age.

"We found that older people are more likely to understand that 140/90 is the entry level for high blood pressure. We also found that this sector of the community is more likely to have their blood pressure checked more often," said Ms Wilson.



# CHOLESTEROL AND BLOOD PRESSURE



Cholesterol is a type of fat or lipid, which is white and waxy. It is carried around your body in blood and helps to keep us healthy.

You don't have to eat foods high in cholesterol, as your body is very good at producing its own. There are two types of cholesterol:

**Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol:** You need a small amount of LDL but sometimes it is called the 'bad' cholesterol as it can clog up your arteries.

**High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol:** This is called the 'good' cholesterol as it helps to remove excess LDL cholesterol from the blood.

Your liver is the processing factory for cholesterol. It makes cholesterol from the

food you eat and releases any it can't use into the blood.

If there is too much cholesterol circulating in your blood, it can build up into fatty deposits.

These deposits cause the arteries to narrow and can eventually block them completely, leading to high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

For the general population, the recommended level of cholesterol is no higher than 5.5mmol/litre.

Following a healthy eating plan can help to lower your cholesterol but sometimes medication may also be needed.

## How to take control

If you have high blood pressure, you have probably heard the advice: "watch what you eat." But what else can you do? Other steps might include:

### **Maintaining a healthy weight**

Men are at increased risk of heart disease if their waistlines are greater than 94cms and high risk at over 102cm. Women are at increased risk of heart disease if their waistlines are greater than 80cm and high risk at more than 88cm.

### **Staying fit**

Do at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.

### **Eating a healthy diet**

### **Drinking water instead of sugary soft drinks**

### **Being a non-smoker**

### **Not drinking too much alcohol**

No more than 2 standard drinks a day for men and one for women is recommended.

### **Enjoying life**

Do things that help you to relax and reduce stress.

### **Good control of blood glucose if you have diabetes**

### **Avoiding some medications**

Make sure you visit your doctor regularly for routine checkups, which should include a blood pressure check.

By taking control and following your health team's advice, you can help to keep your blood pressure within healthy limits. If changes to your lifestyle do not reduce your blood pressure, your doctor can prescribe medications.



For information about the changes you can make to control your blood pressure, visit [www.kidney.org.au](http://www.kidney.org.au) or consult the links and phone numbers on the back of this report.

- 2 million Australians between the age of 16 and 85 years have blood pressure greater than 160/95 or are undergoing treatment for high blood pressure.
- The higher the blood pressure, the higher the risk of stroke, coronary heart disease, heart failure, kidney disease and death.
- Healthy lifestyle choices are the first method of attack against high blood pressure even if medication is also needed.

Source: Kidney Health Australia



## USEFUL LINKS AND KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA CONTACTS

**KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA:** [www.kidney.org.au](http://www.kidney.org.au)

**THE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE RESEARCH COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA:** [www.hbprca.com.au](http://www.hbprca.com.au)

**NATIONAL HEART FOUNDATION:** [www.heartfoundation.com.au](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au)

**HEART MOVES PROGRAM:** [www.heartfoundation.com.au/index.cfm?page=528](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au/index.cfm?page=528)

**DIABETES AUSTRALIA:** [www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au)

**HEALTHINSITE:** [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

**BETTER HEALTH CHANNEL:** [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**HEART SUPPORT AUSTRALIA:** [www.heartnet.org.au](http://www.heartnet.org.au)

**NUTRITION AUSTRALIA:** [www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)

**DIETITIANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA:** [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

**NUTRITION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA:** [www.nsa.asn.au](http://www.nsa.asn.au)

**CENTRE FOR HEALTH PROMOTION:** [www.chdf.org.au](http://www.chdf.org.au)

**AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WEBSITE:** [www.healthysite.gov.au](http://www.healthysite.gov.au)

### **KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA: NORTHERN TERRITORY**

GPO Box 9993, Darwin NT 0801

Telephone: (08) 8948 4359, Fax: (08) 8948 4358

email: [nt@kidney.org.au](mailto:nt@kidney.org.au)

### **KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA: QUEENSLAND**

Suite 2, 117 Scarborough Street, Southport QLD 4215

GPO Box 9993, Brisbane QLD 4001

Telephone: (07) 5591 3040, Fax: (07) 5591 3533

email: [qld@kidney.org.au](mailto:qld@kidney.org.au)

### **KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA: NEW SOUTH WALES**

Level 9, 9-13 Young Street, Sydney NSW 2000

GPO Box 9993, Sydney NSW 2001

Telephone: (02) 9299 4599, Fax: (02) 9290 2629

email: [nsw@kidney.org.au](mailto:nsw@kidney.org.au)

### **KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA: VICTORIA**

344 St Kilda Road, Melbourne VIC 3004

GPO Box 9993, Melbourne VIC 3001

Telephone: (03) 9674 4300, Fax: (03) 9686 7289

email: [vic@kidney.org.au](mailto:vic@kidney.org.au)

### **KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA: TASMANIA**

88 Bathurst Street, Hobart TAS 7000

GPO Box 9993, Hobart TAS 7001

Telephone: (03) 6231 9663, Fax: (03) 6234 5828

email: [tas@kidney.org.au](mailto:tas@kidney.org.au)

### **KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA: SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

82 Melbourne Street, North Adelaide SA 5006

GPO Box 9993, Adelaide SA 5001

Telephone: (08) 8334 7555, Fax: (08) 8334 7545

email: [sa@kidney.org.au](mailto:sa@kidney.org.au)

### **KIDNEY HEALTH AUSTRALIA: WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Level 3, 322 Hay Street, Subiaco WA 6008

GPO Box 9993, Perth WA 6001

Telephone: (08) 9322 1354, Fax: (08) 9481 3707

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Pfizer Australia  
**HEALTH  
REPORT**



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