

TICKER NEWS

Official newsletter of the North Gwent Cardiac Rehabilitation & Aftercare Charity



Blood pressure: the silent killer

We all need to keep an eye on our blood pressure, and with World Hypertension Day just around the corner, on 17 May, it's a good time to remind ourselves why...

Around half of all heart attacks and strokes in Wales are linked to high blood pressure, according to the British Heart Foundation. But it's not something you can usually feel or notice. And because there often no obvious symptoms, high blood pressure can easily be missed, which is why it's sometimes known as the silent killer.

It also causes your arteries to become stiffer and narrower. This makes it easier for fatty deposits to build up inside and cause blockages, leading to a heart attack or stroke.

problems, including kidney failure, heart failure and vascular dementia. That's why it's important to keep an eye on your blood pressure – even if you feel fine.

Left untreated, high blood pressure can also affect your eyesight and cause other

The good news is that thanks to modern medication, high blood pressure is now one of the most preventable and >>

It's normal for your blood pressure to go up and down through the course of the day, depending on what you are doing. But constant high blood pressure – known as hypertension – can lead to serious issues, especially if you have a heart problem.

That's because your heart is already working harder than it should. High blood pressure places even more strain on your heart, making it difficult for it to function properly.



Know your numbers!

Your blood pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg) and recorded using two numbers, one on top of the other.

• **Systolic pressure** is the higher of the two numbers. It's the pressure in your arteries when your heart contracts and pumps blood around your body.

• **Diastolic pressure** is the lower of the two numbers. It's the pressure noted when your heart relaxes between beats.

So if your systolic pressure is 120mmHg, and your diastolic pressure is 80mmHg, this would be written as 120/80, and your doctor or nurse might refer to it as "120 over 80".

• **Normal blood pressure** ranges from 90/60mmHg to 120/80mmHg.

• **High blood pressure** is when your reading is consistently 140/90mmHg or higher.

• **Low blood pressure** is considered to be 89/59mmHg or lower.

<< treatable health conditions. Yet research suggests that at least half of all people diagnosed with high blood pressure aren't taking all of their tablets.

If you're one of them, it's worth remembering that every 10mmHg reduction in systolic pressure reduces your risk of a major cardiovascular event by 20%. And if you control your blood pressure well, you can reduce your risk of stroke and heart disease to almost the same as a person with normal blood pressure.

There's more good news too, because what we eat and drink, and how much we exercise all play a big role in keeping our blood pressure within the normal range. And just a few lifestyle changes can have a real impact. For the most effective ways to reduce your blood pressure, see the top tips, opposite.

► *The information and statistics quoted in this article are sourced from the British Heart Foundation (bhf.org) and Blood Pressure UK (bloodpressureuk.org).*

► **To join our Cardiac Rehab Exercise classes, please ask your hospital team or GP for a referral. Or call us on 07856 692148, or email info@cardiac-rehab.org.uk**

6 top tips to control your blood pressure

- 1 GET ACTIVE**
As well as your weekly Cardiac Rehab Exercise class, aim to do at least 10 minutes of moderate-intensity activity every day, such as brisk walking, cycling or dancing. Moderate-intensity activity is anything that raises your heart rate and makes you breathe faster and feel warmer. You should still be able to talk!
- 2 EAT A HEALTHY BALANCED DIET**
In particular, try to eat a wide variety of vegetables and fruit, choose wholegrain (brown) bread, rice and pasta, and cut back on sugary or salty snacks (biscuits, crisps and so on).
- 3 CUT DOWN ON SALT**
There's hidden salt in everything from breakfast cereals to ready-made pasta sauces and bread, so avoid adding more salt when you're cooking, or at the table. Instead try boosting flavour with herbs and spices, or a squeeze of lemon.



- 4 KEEP TO A HEALTHY WEIGHT**
For some people, losing just a few pounds can bring their blood pressure down to a normal level.
- 5 DRINK LESS ALCOHOL**
Stick within the guidelines (no more than 14 units a week), and aim for several alcohol-free days a week. Check out lower- and no-alcohol alternatives to your usual favourites: many of these are now very good!
- 6 TAKE YOUR MEDICATION!**
Build your medication into your daily routine so it becomes a habit. For example, if you need to take your tablets after breakfast, keep them near the kettle or fridge. Sorting them into a weekly pill box, split into morning and evening doses, can also make it easier to keep track.

Three little nurses

A short story from Monmouth class member and regular contributor **John Mason**

One of the District Nurses was searching through cupboards and shelving, looking for a vital component missing from blood-flow monitoring equipment.

"It's that Tina. She often uses kit and forgets to check it all back in." Sophie was speaking as she sterilised a piece of equipment. Another was making sure her patient had a full set of dressings for use at home. A third tidied the small room.

Jack was half-sitting, half-lying on the treatment bench. The old man's leg problem had gone on for ages and God knows how many different antibiotics, but he was hugely grateful for the nursing care, which had been first class. He wondered why components of expensive medical gear couldn't be kept together in a box or something. Not rocket science surely?

A cry of "Success at last!" A couple of minutes later a loud knock on the door, a voice: "Help please. Now!" Rhiannon, the other nurse, made a rapid exit.

"Jack, one more thing," Sophie said as Rhiannon returned. "You were wheezing a bit after you came up the steps two days ago. We need to test your lung capacity. OK to go ahead?"



"Works for me. Please carry on." Just then the Senior Practice nurse came into the small room. "Hi Gwyneth!" Jack called out. "Welcome! Just room for one more!"

"Thought I'd look in and see you," she replied. She'd looked after him for several months and was concerned at the lack of progress with his leg problem.

Sophie held up the mouthpiece. "Now: big puff, please..."

Jack laughed: 'I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll...'. Gwyneth broke in: "Blow your surgery down?" She held up an evil-looking hypodermic. "Somehow I don't think so!"

The roars of laughter could be heard down the corridor in Reception. Say what you like, but it all goes to show that little nurses aren't so easily taken in nowadays.

Fundraising roundup

Potato Challenge A big thank you to everyone who's entered the Challenge this year. Together you've helped us to reach a new record, with 83 kits sold across the 10 classes (thank you Allen!), and more from our stall at the Abergavenny Garden Centre (thank you Kath, Suzanne, Den, Dave and Andrea for staffing the stall). All told, the Challenge has raised £792 for us, which is great news.

Calon Race Night Despite holding our race night on the same day as a major rugby fixture, we had a great turnout,

and the evening raised an impressive £820 for us. Thanks to everyone who helped make it such a success, including Tony and Allen for sourcing our generous race sponsors and racehorse owners, Adrian Tuck and Ken Cowan for running the event, and Amanda Davies and her team for another fabulous buffet from the Moose Ladies. We hope you all enjoyed the evening as much as we did!

Queens at the Kings raffle This raffle raised a whopping £402 for us and was organised by our fundraising supremo Ashella, for a ladies-only drag night in Abergavenny last month. Thank you Ashella!



Dates for your diary!



Free event: Healthy Hearts, Happy Lives

Join us from 2pm-4:30pm on **Thursday 18 April** at the **Moose Hall** in Tredegar for a **free heart health event**.

Many of you enjoyed the information session at our AGM last November, so this is a chance for everyone to come along and learn more! The event is open to the public, so feel free to bring

along your partner or a friend – and please help us spread the word.

We've arranged a packed programme for the afternoon, with expert advice on managing your cholesterol levels, local healthy-eating initiatives, and how to live well with a long-term health condition. Member Neil Dufty will be joining us again, too, to share

his experience of microvascular angina. Everyone at the AGM found his story so interesting that we thought more people would like to hear it. And of course we'll be serving up free refreshments!



Potato Weigh-in

It's been a cold, wet start to Spring, but we're hoping your spuds are now growing strongly! Do **Grand Reveal and Weigh-in** is at our sponsors, the **Abergavenny Garden Centre**, on **Saturday 22 June**, from 3-4pm, with garden centre vouchers awarded for the top two heaviest harvests in both the Adults and Children's categories. Good luck!



Coffee and cake? Coming right up!

Monmouth's Mary Wakeling and her team of volunteers have planned in **four fundraising coffee mornings** over the course of this year – all running from **10am-midday** at the lovely Monmouth Priory.

So why not make a date with friends? The first is set for **Saturday 11 May**, with the second on **Saturday 22 June**.



Put your best foot forward for World Heart Day



SAVE THE DATE: Sunday 29 September is **World Heart Day**, and we're celebrating with a **sponsored walk and family fun** at the beautiful **Parc Bryn Bach** in Tredegar. We're still finalising the details, but expect a choice of walk distances around the lake to suit all ages and abilities, along with extra activities for the kids.

And if you haven't been to Parc Bryn Bach before, you're in for a treat. The path around the lake is paved and fully accessible, but if you want to go further afield there are 340 acres of meadows and woodlands to explore, with nature walks and an interactive sculpture trail. There's an onsite café, too, as well as WCs and plenty of parking.