

Charity Calls for Home Blood Pressure Monitors to be Available on Prescription

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Home blood pressure monitors should be made available on prescription to anyone who has been diagnosed with high blood pressure to help save the maximum number of lives from strokes and heart disease as well as reducing the number of routine GP visits – says charity, Blood Pressure UK to mark Know Your Numbers! Week (7th-13th September).

By getting the nation's blood pressure under control via home monitoring and medication – especially at a time when access to overwhelmed GPs and other healthcare professionals is restricted during the pandemic – many thousands of lives could be saved from a stroke or heart disease. In fact, 10 million deaths per year are attributed to high blood pressure worldwide.

Whilst the NHS already provides glucose monitors on prescription to patients living with diabetes to measure their blood sugar and help reduce the adverse effects of the condition, a similar approach (i.e. offering home blood pressure monitors on prescription) should be taken by the Government for those most at risk of high blood pressure.

This comes as NEW survey findings show that whilst 32% of those surveyed took up exercise and 29% started eating better following lockdown, blood pressure is still NOT a concern for 66% of respondents – with 60% citing it's because they don't have a problem with it.

Of the 42% of respondents who had high blood pressure, 48% preferred not to say if it was under control. This is worrying, considering high blood pressure is known as the silent killer because there are no symptoms and it remains the biggest single cause of death in the UK. That's why it's important that people have their blood pressure checked regularly, ideally by using a blood pressure monitor at home or via a healthcare professional. By doing this, those with high readings may be prescribed appropriate medication and will be more motivated to adjust their lifestyle habits.

Of the third (35%) of people who own a blood pressure monitor, only 17% use it once a month. Of those that don't own a home blood pressure monitor, 42% say they would rather a healthcare professional checked it, despite home monitoring being recommended by NICE .

Even with recent research suggesting that high blood pressure can be linked to a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19 , half (50%) are still not certain they'll check their blood pressure more regularly.

With unhealthy lifestyles and poor diet contributing to more young people in their 30s, 40s and 50s being diagnosed with hypertension, around 1 in 3 people in the UK are now living with high blood pressure – with 6.5 million people still remaining undiagnosed.

Key risk factors for developing high blood pressure are eating too much salt and not enough fruit and

vegetables, being overweight and not enough exercise. Interestingly though, the survey findings showed 77% of respondents thought stress was among the main causes of high blood pressure.

Professor Graham MacGregor, Chairman of Blood Pressure UK says:

“As an individual, having your blood pressure checked is the most important step that you can take to reduce your risk of stroke, heart attack or heart failure. This is why we are calling for home monitors to be available to those most in need on prescription, especially at a time when appointments with GPs and nurses are restricted which may prolong getting your blood pressure checked. It could just save your life.”

Katharine Jenner – CEO of Blood Pressure UK adds:

“High blood pressure can cause damage to your brain, heart, eyes, and kidneys, and kills thousands of people every year in the UK through heart attacks and strokes, yet is almost entirely preventable and treatable. High blood pressure costs the NHS over £2.1 billion every year and right now it is vital we take the pressure off the health service. High blood pressure develops over the course of several years, but you can immediately put yourself in control by taking steps to lower it by eating less salt, taking more exercise or maintaining a healthy weight.”

Hemini Bharadia, Know Your Numbers! Week Campaign Manager explains:

“Measuring your blood pressure at home and sharing measurements with your doctor has been shown to improve blood pressure control. Since high blood pressure is largely symptomless, home monitoring can really help people to feel more in control of their condition and see how well their treatments are working. Whilst there is a wide range of home blood pressure monitors available, it is important to be sure that the blood pressure monitor you choose is accurate and the right cost for you. Remember to choose one with an upper cuff which is the right size for your arm and make sure it's UK approved. Know Your Numbers! Week is the perfect opportunity to test yourself, ideally at home, quickly and easily and put you in control of your health.”

REGIONAL SURVEY DATA IS AVAILABLE FOR UK KEY REGIONS AND CITIES

Ends

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About Blood Pressure UK

Blood Pressure UK is the UK's leading blood pressure charity working to lower the nation's blood pressure to prevent disability and death from stroke and heart disease. The charity provides information and support for people with high blood pressure and raises awareness to prevent the condition. Blood Pressure UK is the operating name of the Blood Pressure Association, charity reg. 1058944.

Facts about blood pressure from Blood Pressure UK:

- High blood pressure has no obvious signs or symptoms. The only way to find out if you have the

condition is to have a blood pressure check.

- Untreated high blood pressure is the major risk factor for strokes, heart attacks and heart failure. It is also a major risk factor for kidney disease and dementia.
- A healthy blood pressure is a level of 120/80mmHg or less.
- A blood pressure of 121/81mmHg to 139/89mmHg is on the high side and lifestyle changes such as eating less salt, more fruit and veg and losing weight if necessary should be advised.
- If readings are consistently at or above 140/90mmHg, high blood pressure is diagnosed, and action should be taken to lower it by leading a healthier lifestyle, and, if necessary, by taking medication as directed by your doctor.

How Can I Check My Blood Pressure at Home?

- Avoid tobacco, alcohol, exercise, and caffeine a half hour before you take a reading.
- Find a quiet place and sit in a comfortable chair.
- Arm resting at chest height, back supported and feet flat on the floor.
- Follow your monitor's instruction booklet to position the cuff properly against bare skin on the upper arm and inflate it. Cuff should be at heart level.
- Check the readings.
- Finally, establish a routine for checking your blood pressure at home.

Also:

- Whilst there is a wide range of home blood pressure monitors available, it is important to be sure that the blood pressure monitor you choose is accurate and the right cost for you. Remember to choose one with an upper cuff which is the right size for your arm and make sure it's UK approved
- Quarantine your monitor for a minimum of 24 hrs after using it, or use a plastic bag or plastic gloves to cover and handle the machine – it will still work through a plastic layer – then throw the plastic away after use.
- Make sure you wash your hands before and after using your machine. If your friend or family member are unable to operate the machine themselves and you check their blood pressure for them, make sure you're both wearing face masks.

Blood Pressure UK's 'Top five tips for a healthy blood pressure':

1. Cut down on salt – Reducing your salt intake is the quickest way to lower your blood pressure. Don't add it when cooking or at the table, avoid using stock cubes, gravy and soy sauce, check food labels and avoid processed foods high in salt – aim to eat less than 6g a day.
2. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables – at least five different portions every day.
3. Watch your weight – try to reach the right weight for your height.
4. Exercise regularly – that doesn't have to mean the gym, how about a regular lunchtime walk? 30 minutes five times a week is ideal. If you are unsure about taking up exercise, ask your GP.
5. Drink alcohol in moderation – up to 14 units a week for both men and women – a glass of wine or a pint of beer is 2-3 units.