**saundersstreetclinic**

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**Opening hours**

Monday - Thursday 9am-1230 pm, 2pm-5 pm

Friday 9am-1230 pm, 2.30pm-5 pm

Saturday, Sunday, Public Holidays closed

Doctors: Jim Berryman, Chris Hughes, Yas Sanli, Ali Johnson, Sarvin Randhawa, Lou Sykes, Jessie Andrewarthur, Tim Andrewarthur and Bradley Williams.

 Registered Nurses: Fiona Munday (nurse manager) and Belinda Townsend.

**We are mindful that patients who work office hours have trouble being seen because we also work office hours. Make an enquiry as often your GP may be at work early or be prepared to stay**

High blood pressure is one of Australia's biggest killers, but you can take control

Key Points

* High blood pressure is a 'silent condition', you may not know you have it
* There are simple ways to reduce your risk of high blood pressure
* Talk to your GP about getting tested and keeping your blood pressure healthy

**What is blood pressure?**

As your heart pumps, blood is pushed around your body through blood vessels, placing a force on the walls of those vessels.

Pressure can build up if your vessels are too narrow, if your heart is beating too fast or too hard, or if the volume of your blood increases due to fluid retention.

When this pressure is consistently too great, you have high blood pressure (also known as hypertension), which puts strain on your body.

"You've got 100,000 heartbeats in an average day. If each time your heart beats it is beating against an increased pressure, this causes structural and functional damage to the heart, the kidneys, the brain and the arteries themselves," explained James Sharman, deputy director of the Menzies Institute for Medical Research.

**How do I know if I have high blood pressure?**

The tricky thing is, high blood pressure may be playing havoc with your body without you knowing. That is why it's known as a silent killer.

It is worthwhile checking your blood pressure even if you feel fit and healthy, according to Natalie Raffoul, risk reduction manager at the Heart Foundation.

"People think if they feel fine, they don't have to worry about it. In fact, that is not correct," she said.

To get an accurate picture of you blood pressure your GP will get you to take multiple tests over time.

Blood pressure naturally changes throughout the day. It reacts to exercise, rest, caffeine consumption and more. It can even elevate due to the stress of a blood pressure test.

**So what do those numbers mean?**

The two numbers you receive back are separate measures.

The top number in your reading is your **systolic blood pressure.** This value is always the highest because it measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart contracts.

The bottom reading is called **diastolic blood pressure**. This value is lower because it measures the pressure between contractions.

The risk to your health increases on a continuum as both those numbers increase, Dr Sharman said.

"However, for convenience, some threshold values of 'normal' and 'raised' blood pressure have been created," he said.

A reading of **120/80** mm Hg is considered **normal.**

Readings between **120/80** and **139/89** mm Hg are considered **normal to high.**

If your reading comes in at **140/90** mm Hg or greater you have **high blood pressure.**

**What causes high blood pressure?**

It can be hard to pinpoint the exact reason why a person may present with high blood pressure, but the risk factors are well known.

Your blood pressure can be affected by factors such as:

* Eating patterns, including salty foods
* Weight
* Alcohol consumption
* How much physical activity you do

**What steps can I take to help prevent high blood pressure?**

Dr Sharman encourages people to start taking control of their blood pressure by **getting active.**

This may seem counterintuitive as exercise temporarily raises blood pressure. However, inactivity is a big risk factor for this disease.

"Exercise addresses so many risk factors in one hit," Dr Sharman said.

 "It will help improve the structure and function of your arteries and heart, it will make your cholesterol profile more favourable, improve blood glucose, improve insulin sensitivity, less likely to develop diabetes and of course it's part of a regimen to maintain a healthy body weight."

Even a single exercise session can reduce blood pressure for up to 24 hours. When exercise is incorporated into daily life, the effect is more long lasting.

**A healthy diet** packed with fruit and vegies is a great way to lower your risk of high blood pressure.

Cutting down on salt will also help, Ms Raffoul said.

"The link between high salt intake and high blood pressure is strong," she said.

"The higher your salt intake, the more fluid your body retains."

Health experts recommend you limit your daily salt intake to no more than one-and-a-half teaspoons a day.

The lion's share of most people's salt intake is hidden in highly processed foods, sauces (such as soy or tomato sauce), takeaway or restaurant foods.

Salt can hide in surprising places. According on the [**Australian Healthy Food Guide**](https://www.healthyfoodguide.com.au/articles/2017/april/how-much-salt-are-you-really-eating#h2-1), just two slices of some breads can provide a third of your recommended daily salt intake.

When you are eating packaged food, Ms Raffoul suggests looking for "no salt" or "low salt" options.

You can also replace your humble table salt with spicier alternatives.

"The simplest thing you can do to reduce your salt intake is to use herbs and spices to flavour your food instead of salt," she said.

**Reducing stress** may also help — at least in the short term.

When you get a fright, the colour drains from your face. This is a result of the famed "flight or fight response".

Small blood vessels in the skin, digestive system and other places contract. This redirects blood to where it needs to go to keep you alive in that moment.

"Acute periods of stress, which replicate the flight or fight response, do elevate blood pressure temporarily," Ms Raffoul said.

"Getting these temporary spikes daily can cause long-term damage to your blood vessels and increase your risk of a heart event," she said.

"The link between chronic anxiety and high blood pressure is not yet fully understood."

**Quitting smoking** is also recommended, Dr Sharman said.

"If you have got high blood pressure and you smoke, it amplifies your risk [of stroke or a heart event] substantially," he said.

**What if high blood pressure runs in my family?**

 Having a family history of high blood pressure does not mean you are doomed to high blood pressure forever.

"People think if they have high blood pressure in their family they can't do anything about it," Ms Raffoul said.

"There are still plenty of things you can do about it."

Knowing that high blood pressure is common in your family can be a powerful tool. Talking to your GP about your family history can help them give treatment and advice.

What happens if I'm diagnosed with high blood pressure?

If lifestyle changes above alone are not enough to help you manage your blood pressure, your GP may also recommend medications, which need to be taken for the long-term.

[Next check up, ask your GP about getting your blood pressure checked.](https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2019-06-01/blood-pressure-what-does-it-mean-and-how-can-i-manage-it/11165060%22%20%5Cl%20%22lightbox-content-lightbox-32%22%20%5Co%20%22Open%20lightbox)

"Often people think if they are on blood pressure lowering medicines, they can stop taking their medicine if their blood pressure becomes normal, when in fact these are usually longer-term medicines." she said.

Monitoring your blood pressure using a home testing kit with guidance from a GP on a regular basis can help you take ownership of your treatment.

But there can be some pitfalls if you invest in the wrong machine, Ms Raffoul said.

"When buying home blood pressure devices, you need to make sure you get a validated device so that the readings that they get at home are accurate and reliable."

She recommended buying blood pressure machines from a reputable seller such as your pharmacy, and avoiding using finger or wrist devices.

"High blood pressure is usually quite easily managed though positive lifestyle changes and possibly medications." she said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2019-06-01/blood-pressure-what-does-it-mean-and-how-can-i-manage-it/11165060>

Children and the Flu

On average, [between five and 10 Australian children](https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/39412/NCIRS-child-deaths-from-infectious-diseases-report-2016-NSW-Ombudsman-final-1.pdf) are reported to die from influenza each year. Tragically, [many flu deaths](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/132/5/796.long) occur in previously healthy children.

These deaths can [frequently be prevented](https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/news-and-publications/publications/reports/child-death-review-team/child-deaths-from-vaccine-preventable-infectious-diseases%2C-nsw-2005-2014) through vaccination. Analysis by Australian researchers determined that, of the children who died from influenza in New South Wales in the 10 years to 2014, none were vaccinated.

**More cases and greater harms**
Influenza virus is predominantly spread in droplets created when people with flu cough and sneeze. The virus can also live on objects touched by those with flu, picked up by the hands of others.

Children are more likely to catch and spread influenza. They have large volumes of virus in their nasal secretions and, after infection, shed this for days. They also have poorer hygiene practices, often coughing and spluttering over those closest to them.

Although children with underlying medical conditions, including chronic disorders of the heart, lungs, nervous and immune system are most susceptible, [more than half of children](https://academic.oup.com/cid/article-abstract/68/6/940/5077025) admitted to hospital each year are healthy.

**What should you look out for?**
Influenza [most commonly causes](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26619439) fever, cough, headache, a sore throat and a runny nose. The virus can also infect the lungs, causing pneumonia.

Some children react to the infection by developing vomiting, diarrhoea and muscle aches and pains.

Many parents aren’t aware that influenza can also cause [damage to the brain](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29017268), heart, kidneys and muscles. It is unclear why these complications occur in some children and not others, but they can be severe.

Young children get frequent infections and often develop symptoms that are difficult to distinguish from influenza. Testing on a nose or throat swab can be done to confirm if the illness is caused by influenza virus.

Parents should seek medical attention if their child:

* has difficulty breathing (breathing rapidly or drawing in chest or neck muscles)
* is vomiting and refusing to drink
* is more sleepy than normal
* has pain that doesn’t get better with simple pain relief medication.

Most importantly, anyone worried about a child during the flu season should see a doctor.

**How does this year’s season compare?**
Australia has had an unusual start to the [2019 influenza season](https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cda-surveil-ozflu-flucurr.htm/%24File/flu-02-2019.pdf), with higher numbers of cases during the warmer months than expected.

The number of cases of influenza diagnosed each week is currently greater than in 2017 and in the 2009 swine flu pandemic.

In 2017, Australia experienced its worst influenza season on record. More than [220,000 Australians](https://theconversation.com/heres-why-the-2017-flu-season-was-so-bad-86605) were diagnosed with influenza, with healthcare services and hospitals inundated with children, adults and the elderly suffering the effects of influenza.

The stories of [healthy young people](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/sep/18/melbourne-girl-eight-dies-as-australias-horror-flu-season-continues) succumbing to flu were particularly heartbreaking.

Although it is never possible to predict what will happen in coming months, a number of measures point to a larger than average influenza season in 2019.

**How can children be protected?**
Vaccination [is recommended](https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccine-preventable-diseases/influenza-flu) for all Australians from six months of age.

It’s free for all children aged from six months to under five years, those with certain medical risk factors, including severe asthma and chronic heart, respiratory, neurological and immune conditions, all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, pregnant women, and people aged 65 years and over.

Those too young to be vaccinated (children five months and younger) are protected by their mothers being vaccinated during pregnancy.

People can be[vaccinated](https://beta.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/getting-started/where-can-i-get-immunised) at a general practice, council or community health clinic, or Aboriginal Medical Service.

As the virus is constantly changing, the effectiveness of the vaccine can vary each year. Australian research has shown that the risk of flu is reduced, on average, by [50–60%](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24753525) in children who receive the vaccine.

This can mean that some children who get vaccinated will unfortunately still get the flu. However, [some evidence](https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2016.21.30.30301) suggests the disease will be milder if you catch it and have been vaccinated.

It’s not possible to predict who will catch the flu or develop complications, but vaccination remains the most effective and [safest tool](http://www.ausvaxsafety.org.au/influenza-vaccine/2019-influenza-data) to protect children against influenza.

Childhood flu vaccination programs have an added bonus of [reducing flu in others in the community](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28475770) who are not vaccinated by reducing the spread of the virus. This is called ‘herd’ or ‘community’ immunity and particularly helps protect vulnerable people who may be at risk of becoming seriously ill with the flu.

<https://theconversation.com/kids-are-more-vulnerable-to-the-flu-heres-what-to-look-out-for-this-winter-117748>