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Know your numbers

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Know your numbers - Blood pressure awareness

One in three adults in the UK are affected by high blood pressure, with an estimated five million people that are undiagnosed with the condition in England alone.

Since high blood pressure is a risk factor for several serious health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, dementia, kidney disease, heart attack and stroke, this is a worrying statistic. Fortunately, once high blood pressure has been identified there are steps we can take to help bring it back to a healthy level.

There are medications available that help to lower blood pressure; however, it can also be managed by making some positive lifestyle changes. Maintaining a healthy weight, following a healthy diet, keeping physically active, avoiding smoking, limiting your alcohol intake, and coping with emotional stresses healthily, can all play apart in reducing your high blood pressure.

Often referred to as a 'silent killer', many people who suffer from high blood pressure are unaware, as there's often no noticeable symptoms to go with it.

It's important to regularly have your **blood pressure measured**, as this is the only way to know whether it's high or not. You can get your blood pressure measured at most high street pharmacies, your doctor's surgery, or, if you are eligible, by arranging a free **NHS Health Check**.

Blood pressure monitors are available at most pharmacies and there's a huge advantage to testing at home, as not only is it convenient, it provides a more accurate reading as you are likely to be more relaxed. You can follow this **guidance on how to measure your blood pressure from home**, and find a list of validated blood pressure monitors for home use **here**.



Migraine awareness

While it's normal to experience occasional headaches after a stressful day or week at work, migraines are more severe and can be difficult to manage. Around 10 million people, aged between 15 and 69, are affected by migraines in the UK.

Each year the NHS spends an estimated £150 million per year on treating migraines and £250 million on care for headache sufferers. There's also around three million migraine-related sick days each year, costing the economy around £4.4 billion.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can vary from person to person, but can include sensitivity to light and sound, throbbing pains on one side of the head, dizziness, extreme fatigue, vision changes, aura (seeing flashing lights, zigzag lines, or stars) nausea and sickness. Some people who suffer with them also experience nausea or vomiting.

This can impact your ability to carry out day-to-day activities, like working, parenting, or taking care of yourself.

The NHS website recommends seeing a GP if:

- Your migraines are getting worse or are lasting longer than usual.
- You have migraines more than once a week.
- You're finding it difficult to control your migraines.

Find further guidelines, including when to contact NHS 111 or the emergency services on the NHS website.

What causes migraines?

Whilst migraines don't have any identifiable cause, many possible triggers have been suggested which include hormonal, physical, emotional, dietary, environmental and medicinal. If you suffer from migraines then keeping a diary can be useful to help identify what triggers your migraines.

This diary should contain:

- The date and time you experienced the migraine.
- Any warning signs you experienced.
- Your symptoms (including the presence or absence of aura).
- What medication you took.
- When the migraine ended.

What can I do to help manage symptoms?

It may help to rest in a dark and quiet room, if you have a migraine. Taking steps to avoid known triggers can also help i.e. if stress is a trigger, stress management and relaxation techniques could be adopted to help manage the onset of migraines. Make an appointment with your GP if you're interested in finding out what possible medication and supplements are available to help.

The charity **Migraine Trust** have lots of great resources if you suffer from migraines, think you might be suffering from them, or know someone who does.

