

Living with Hypertension



Taking control

Acknowledgements

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The information contained in this workbook is not intended to be used for medical diagnosis or treatment or as a substitute for professional medical advice. Individual symptoms, situations, and circumstances may vary. You should always consult your physician or qualified health care provider regarding your condition and appropriate medical treatment.

Living with hypertension: Taking control

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Introduction

Congratulations! By reading this book and participating in this program, you have taken an important step to gain better control of your high blood pressure. This workbook has been designed especially for you, based on the information we obtained from other patients with high blood pressure: how it has affected their lives, ways in which they manage their high blood pressure, and how they have overcome challenges they face in managing their high blood pressure. The information provided in this workbook will help you to better understand what high blood pressure is, how it can affect you, and how you can better manage it and live a healthier life.

This workbook is organized into eight sections. Each section starts with brief personal stories of people with high blood pressure: what they have to say about living with high blood pressure, their fears, concerns and what really helps them manage their high blood pressure. These people, whose stories you will read, come from all walks of life. Read through these stories and think about how they may be similar to your experiences. We think you will be moved by each story. You may even find a little of yourself in what each has to say.

Next, in some sections, you will find a series of frequently asked questions that most people ask about high blood pressure and its treatment. The answers will provide you with information that can help you to improve your knowledge of high blood pressure and more importantly how you can live a healthy life.

At the end of each section, you will find some self-assessment activities that will help you to check your knowledge and record your progress in making changes that can help you manage your high blood pressure. Finally, we provided some additional resources at the end of the workbook to assist you in getting more information - information that we think might help you take control of your high blood pressure.

We hope in reading this workbook you will learn more about high blood pressure, and be motivated to make important lifestyle changes that will help you to lead a healthier life.

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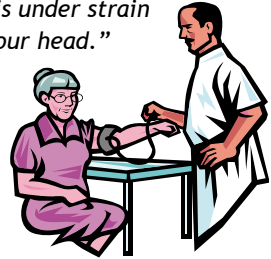


Chapter 1.

What is Hypertension?

"I have no idea what it really means. Maybe that your heart is under strain to pump and then that blood enters your brain or comes to your head."

"If you can't sweat, everything stays in your body: Too much blood! In Holland you don't sweat, but in Africa, you sweat."



Frequently Asked Questions

What is blood pressure?

Blood is transported through the body in vessels called arteries. Each time the heart beats, it pumps out blood into these arteries. As blood flows through the arteries, it produces a force. Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. Blood pressure is measured as two numbers, the systolic pressure (as the heart beats) and the diastolic pressure (as the heart relaxes between beats). When the two measurements are written down, the systolic pressure is the first or top number, and the diastolic pressure is the second or bottom number. Both numbers are important and must be in certain range.

What is hypertension or high blood pressure?

A typical normal blood pressure is a systolic number of 120 and a diastolic number of 80 mm Hg, or "120 over 80", or 120/90. Blood pressure rises and falls throughout the day. When blood pressure stays elevated over time it is called hypertension, or high blood pressure. A blood pressure of 140/90 or higher is considered high blood pressure. Both numbers are important. If one or both numbers are high, you have high blood pressure. Hypertension is the medical term that is used for high blood pressure. Hypertension does not mean feeling tense or nervous. If you are being treated for high blood pressure, you still have high blood pressure even if you have repeated readings in the normal range. Once high blood pressure develops, it usually lasts a lifetime.

What causes high blood pressure?

In most people, the cause of high blood pressure is not known. Physicians refer to this as essential or primary hypertension. In some people their high blood pressure is the result of another medical problem or medication. This is known as secondary high blood pressure.

Who gets high blood pressure?

In the Netherlands, high blood pressure occurs more often in people of African origin. About 30% of White Dutch people have high blood pressure and about 50% in people of African origin.

Compared to other groups, people of African origin:

- Tend to get high blood pressure earlier in life.
- Usually have higher blood pressures.
- Have a higher death rate from stroke, heart disease, and kidney failure.

Your chances of getting high blood pressure are also higher if you:

- Are overweight.
- Are a man over the age of 45 or a woman over the age of 55.
- Have a family history of high blood pressure.
- Have blood pressure in the “prehypertension range” (120-139/80-89).
- Have an unhealthy dietary intake (e.g. too much salt, fat).
- Are physically inactive.

What are the signs and symptoms of high blood pressure?

Hypertension rarely leads to complaints. You can feel fine and your blood pressure can be very high. However, many people say that they are able to recognise signs and symptoms when the blood pressure is too high, for example a painful or tense feeling in the head, dizziness or a lack of energy:

“I get headache and pain in my leg. Sometimes I feel very weak, you know. Very ... very tired.”

Or:

“When my blood pressure is too high I see stars, or I become dizzy. Then I know that ... well: there is something wrong here.”

Be careful, the only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked by a health professional.

How does having high blood pressure affect my other organs?

Even though high blood pressure has no signs or symptoms, it can still cause problems with your other organs. Many people view high blood pressure as a disease that will affect them immediately as soon as the blood pressure rises. They often compare it to an “overfilled balloon”, which can explode at any given moment:

“And then that blood enters your brain or comes to your head. And then it wants to get out. It has to get away somehow, somewhere, because there is that pressure.”

Indeed, having high blood pressure that is not treated can affect your organs: your heart, brain, eyes, and kidneys. However, this will not occur immediately but in the longer run. When these organs are affected it can lead to heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, blindness, and kidney failure.

Know your facts about high blood pressure

1. What are some risk factors for having high blood pressure?

a.

b.

c.

d.

2. What parts of the body can be affected by high blood pressure?

a.

b.

c.

d.

3. When was the last time you had your blood pressure checked?

4. What was your blood pressure during your last medical visit?



Chapter 2.

Controlling Your Hypertension

"I used to eat anything, but I changed after my sister and my mother had a stroke. I changed my own diet."

"You know what I have found helps me most: my faith. It's important to me. And it's helped me to take charge."

"The church is helping me with my blood pressure, because once a week we go to exercise training. That is helping me."

"In the past I always thought that I could have a heart attack or a stroke if I were to play sport. After the doctor said that exercise is important, I started seeing sport as part of the treatment for high blood pressure."

Frequently Asked Questions

What are ways to control my blood pressure?

Once you are told that you have high blood pressure, it can not be cured, but there is a lot you can do to control your blood pressure. Everyone with high blood pressure should have a goal blood pressure to aim for. Usually, the goal is to keep your blood pressure below 140/90 or lower if you have diabetes or chronic kidney disease. Ask your doctor what your blood pressure goal should be.

What things can I do to take charge and control my blood pressure?

Adopting healthy lifestyle habits is a good first step in controlling high blood pressure. It can also help to prevent the chances of heart attack, heart failure or stroke. These consist of eating healthy foods; cutting down on salt and sodium in your diet; losing excess weight and staying at a healthy weight; staying physically active; quitting smoking; and limiting your alcohol intake.

People who need medication should take the medicines as prescribed (*see next chapter for information about this topic*).

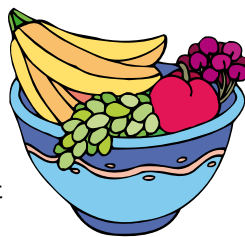
1. Adopt healthy eating habits

Research has shown that following a healthy eating plan can both reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure and lower an already elevated blood pressure. Research showed that elevated blood pressures were reduced by an eating plan that includes fruits, vegetables, and low fat dairy foods and is low in saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol. The eating plan includes whole grains, poultry,



fish, and nuts and has reduced amounts of fats, red meats, sweets, and sugared beverages. You can reduce the fat and cholesterol in your diet without sacrificing flavor. Here are some easy ways to cut back on fat and cholesterol:

- Eat three balanced meals a day, including multiple servings of fruits and vegetables.
- Cut fat off meat.
- Use nonstick sprays or cookware (e.g. “Tefal”).
- Pour off the liquid fat when you cook meat.
- Bake, broil, steam, microwave, or barbecue your food instead of frying it.
- Find substitutes for fat to use for seasoning food.
- Find low-fat or nonfat versions of items like salad dressings, frozen desserts and baked goods.
- Read labels when you buy prepared foods, and find the brand that is lowest in fat content.
- Plan for low-fat snacks, like fruits or vegetables, and carry them with you so you will not be tempted to buy “junk food”.
- When eating out, look for healthy items on the menu.
- Use low fat or nonfat dairy products, such as skim milk.
- Use liquid vegetable oils instead of margarine, butter (but no palm oil).



2. Decrease the amount of sodium or salt in your diet

A key to healthy eating is choosing foods lower in sodium, also known as salt. Most people consume more salt than they need. The current recommendation is to consume less than 2.4 grams (2,400 mg) of sodium a day. That equals 6 grams (about 1 teaspoon) of table salt a day. The 6 grams include ALL salt and sodium consumed, including that used in cooking and at the table. Sodium can also be in many beverages. For someone with high blood pressure, the doctor may advise eating less salt and sodium, as recent research has shown that people consuming diets of 1,500 mg of sodium had even better blood pressure lowering benefits. Research has shown that a sodium restricted diet is particularly effective in people with high blood pressure of African origin. These lower-sodium diets also can keep blood pressure from rising and help blood pressure medicines work well. You can reduce the sodium in your diet with a few simple steps:

- *Cut down on salt used when cooking.*
 - Reduce the amount of salt added to half the amount suggested.
 - Replace salt with alternative flavorings like pepper, garlic, lemon juice, herbs, and spices.
 - Be careful with the use of seasonings (maggi cubes, aromat, seasoning salt).



- *Cut down on salt used at the table.*
 - Taste food before adding salt.
 - Remove the salt shaker from the table.
- *Eat wisely at restaurants.*
 - If you eat at fast-food restaurants, ask for the sodium content of the foods, so you can check the different items.
 - In Chinese restaurants, ask for food without monosodium glutamate (MSG or Ajinomoto).
- *Check labels on food purchased at the grocery store.*
 - Use labels to compare the amount of sodium in canned, frozen, and packaged foods.
 - Look for foods or seasonings that are labeled “low sodium” or “sodium free”.
 - Whenever possible, start with fresh food that you can season yourself.

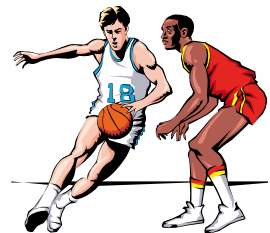
See additional file with diet recommendations for Ghanaian citizens in the Netherlands.

3. Lose excess weight and stay at a healthy weight

If you have high blood pressure and are also overweight you should take steps to reduce body weight. The good news is that most people with high blood pressure can reduce their systolic blood pressure with 6 mmHg by losing as little as 9 pounds. Making changes in your diet and doing a physical activity are important ways that you can lose weight.

4. Stay physically active

“In Ghana I would walk from here to Central Station without taking a metro or car. You don’t have money to pay a taxi or metro. All you do is exercise. So in Ghana the people are healthier than we Ghanaians in Europe.”



You don’t have to join an expensive gym or spend hours doing exercise. All it takes is at least 30 to 45 minutes of your time on all or most days of the week. There are many physical activity programs you can do right at home such as dancing or walking. You can do regular physical activity by participating in your favorite sport, cycling, swimming, or jogging. Whatever you choose as your activity, make sure to speak with your doctor first to find the safest exercise program for you. Your doctor can also give you advice about physical fitness programs that are available in your neighbourhood.

5. Limit your alcohol intake

Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure and also increases the risk



for stroke, liver disease, and other serious conditions. If you drink alcoholic beverages, have only a moderate amount - one drink a day for women; two drinks a day for men. This could include two 12-oz beers, two 5-oz glasses of wine, or one 2-oz shot of 100-proof whiskey.

6. Quit smoking

Smoking is not healthy for anyone, especially if you have high blood pressure. Smoking injures blood vessel walls and speeds up the process of hardening of the arteries. Smoking can increase the risk of heart disease which can be very serious in people with high blood pressure. Your doctor can help you stop smoking, should you decide to quit. There are a number of available products (e.g., nicotine patch, gum, medication) designed to help you quit smoking.



7. Reduce stress

"Everybody who gets high blood pressure is stressed, stressed! When you open your mailbox, bills, bills, only bills, for months on end! Yeah, as Ghanaians, we are not used to such things."

Research has shown that stress can make blood pressure go up but the long-term effects of stress on blood pressure are unclear. While decreasing stress may not prevent high blood pressure, it can help to control it. Stress can lead to other unhealthy habits such as smoking, overeating, or drinking too much alcohol. Learning to reduce or manage stress in your life can be helpful in the overall management of your blood pressure and your overall health. You can not eliminate all the stress in your life but you can change the way you react emotionally or physically to stress. Speak to your doctor about stress reducing programs and relaxation techniques. Here are some things you can do to help reduce stress:

- Sign up for an exercise class such as a dance class, Yoga, Tai Chi, or swimming lessons.
- Schedule time everyday to take a brisk walk.
- Reduce your alcohol and caffeine intake.



Take charge of your high blood pressure

1. Write down the list of things you do to take charge of your blood pressure.

a.

b.

c.

d.

2. Take time to review some of your health practices and answer the following questions:

● **How many times a week do you exercise?**

● **How many minutes do you exercise daily?**

● **What is your weight?**

● **How many servings of fruits and vegetables do you eat daily?**

● **How much fat and cholesterol is in your diet?**

● **How much sodium or salt do you consume daily in your diet?**

Chapter 3.

Common Medications for Hypertension

“With these very simple medications I am able to keep my blood pressure completely in control.”

“Without the medication, I don’t know what condition I would be in. So I don’t have a problem taking my blood pressure medication every day.”

“You need to find something that will help. I believe you have to take it regularly. You can’t stop it.”

Why should I take my medicine regularly?

Taking your medicine regularly can help to lower your blood pressure. It can also help to prevent the chances of heart attack, heart failure, stroke, blindness, and kidney failure. Taking your blood pressure medicine can control your blood pressure but can not cure it.



What should I know about my blood pressure medications?

- Take your medication as prescribed: If the doctor prescribes medications, take them every day, on time, even if you feel fine. Never adjust or discontinue your medication without consulting a doctor.
- Take only those medications that are prescribed to you: There are many kinds of high blood pressure medicines. Some may cause different reactions. Do not take medications for your blood pressure that your doctor does not know about. It is also not safe to share medications with your friends or family members because they may respond to them differently.
- Get all the information you need: Be sure you understand why and how to take your medicine. Take this workbook with you to your healthcare practice. Ask your doctor to write the information you need to know on the form in this workbook (see chapter 4).
- Pay attention to how you feel: Let your doctor know immediately if you are developing any symptoms or side effects while taking your medicine, for example, feeling dizzy, tired, or nauseous or developing a rash or swelling.

What types of medications are used to treat high blood pressure?

Blood pressure medicines work in different ways to lower blood pressure. Some drugs work by removing extra fluid and salt from your body, while others affect blood pressure by slowing down the heartbeat, or by relaxing and widening blood vessels.

Blood pressure medicines are grouped according to how they work:

Diuretics: Also known as “water pills”. They work by helping the body to get rid of excess sodium and water from the body.



Beta Blockers: Slow the heart rate so the heart works less hard.

Calcium channel blockers: Prevent calcium from entering the muscle cells of blood vessels so they remain more relaxed. When blood vessels are more relaxed, it is easier for the heart to pump blood.

Angiotensin converting enzymes (ACE) inhibitors: Keep your body from making certain hormones that can cause blood vessels to narrow. Narrowing of the blood vessels makes it harder for the heart to pump blood through them.

Angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs): Also lower the blood pressure by reducing certain hormones, which can cause narrowing.

Alpha blockers: Prevent narrowing of the blood vessels, by reducing nerve impulses. This allows blood to pass more easily and causing blood pressure to go down.

Can I use natural medicines?

“Now and than I take a tablet in between ... once a week a tablet and for the rest I drink this Neem.”

“When you use those tablets you get other troubles, for instance kidney problems or ... you lose your erection, that’s number one.”

“... you depend on the tablets every day. Maybe one day, you need tablets and you’ll be in Ghana. And there’s no tablet anymore there.”

Sometimes people prefer herbal or home remedies because they fear side effects of the medication. A remedy that is often used by Ghanaians is perekesese. People from Suriname often use remedies from Suriname, such as bush-sopropo, coconut bark, red cotton, neem, papaya leaf, garlic tea, blanched celery, cucumber, and lemon. These remedies are sometimes used as a substitute for the prescribed medication.

Be careful, because the claimed effects are not proven. Speak to your doctor about your concerns/ideas or about the remedies you use. Doctors are interested in these matters and consider it very important to discuss with you how you can best manage your medication.



Know your medications for hypertension

Below is a guide that you can use to discuss your medication with your doctor. For each medication that you take you should know the following information about it.

• Name of your medicine		
• How much should I take?		
• How often?		
• Can this medicine be taken with food?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
• Should I take my medicine before a meal?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
• If yes, how long before a meal should I take my medicine?	<input style="width: 50px;" type="text"/> Hours	
• Should I take my medicine after a meal?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
• If yes, how long after a meal should I take my medicine?	<input style="width: 50px;" type="text"/> Hours	
• If I run out of medicine, my doctor says do this:		
• If I forget to take a dose, my doctor says do this:		
• What are some possible side effects of my medication:		
• If they occur, what should I do and who should I call:		
• Other special instructions:		

Take this form to your next doctor's visit and fill it out with your doctor.

Take this form to your next doctor's visit and fill it out with your doctor.

Name of medicine	How much	How often	What times	Special instructions

Natural remedies?


Chapter 4.

Taking Medications Regularly

“If I put my medicine away, I’ll probably forget about it, and then forget to take it. But I keep it in front of my face, so first thing in the morning when I get up I’ll have a piece of toast or something and take my medication.”

How can I remember to take my medicines?

There are several things you can do that can help you to remember to take your medicine as prescribed. Here are some tips that have worked for other people:

1. Place your medicines in a place that is easy to reach and easy to see.

- A “medication organizer” or weekly pill box can help you to organize your medicine according to the time of day they should be taken. Fill the organizer so all of your pills will be ready to take at the right time each day. You can get one of these organizers at your local pharmacy or ask your doctor where you can get one.
- Use reminders or little notes that can help to remind yourself to take your blood pressure medicine, i.e., on the refrigerator, on the bathroom mirror, on the front door or kitchen.
- If you travel frequently, fasten a note to your luggage reminding you to pack your pills. Take an extra prescription when traveling in case you lose your pills. If you travel by airplane, carry your medicine aboard the airplane with you. In case your luggage is misplaced, you will have your medicines with you.

2. Establish a routine or a system for taking your medicine at the same time everyday.

- Take your high blood pressure medicine right after you brush your teeth and keep it with your toothbrush as a reminder.
- Put the pills where you’ll see them, such as on the table where you usually eat or on the night stand next to your side of the bed.

3. Ask your friends and family to assist you.

- Ask other members of your household to help you to remember to take your medications. Establish a buddy system with a friend who also is on daily medication and arrange to call each other every day with a reminder to “take your medicine”.
- Ask one or more of your children or grandchildren to call you every day with a quick reminder. It’s a great way to stay in touch and for the little ones love to help out.

4. Use telephone reminders as a reminder.

- Use your mobile phone, a beeping watch, or a personal computer as other ways of reminding yourself to take your medication.
- Remember to refill your prescription. Make a note on your calendar to order and pick up the next refill at least one week before the medicine is due to run out.

Take action today with your blood pressure medication

Write down three tips you currently use to help you take your blood pressure medicine.

1.

2.

3.



Write down the names of a family member or friend that you would enlist to help you take your blood pressure medicine.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Chapter 5.

Gaining the Confidence to Control Hypertension



Taking control of your high blood pressure is important in managing your health and well-being. Taking control includes learning skills that you may already have, practicing those skills, and mastering them- skills like taking your medicines, eating right, and being physically active. You may already know that these activities are important in managing your high blood pressure, but actually doing them may be challenging. Mastering these skills will enable you to manage your high blood pressure with confidence.

Being confident is a key factor in taking control and managing high blood pressure. When you are confident, you are not only more likely to perform a task, like taking your medicines as prescribed by your doctor, but also more likely to believe that you will complete the task, and do it well. Having confidence makes it likely that you will succeed.

Being confident may be one reason why some people are able to take their medicines for their high blood pressure, and to keep it in control.

How do some people become more confident than others? Having the belief that you can perform a task is the first step to being more confident. Setting an attainable goal might be one way to gain confidence. Reaching that goal will help you to feel that you are more likely to succeed. Talking to people about things that they do to control their high blood pressure might give you some ideas about what might work specifically for you and how you can incorporate these ideas into your own life. Knowing about the success of other people who have high blood pressure can help you gain confidence that you too will be successful in taking control.

The remaining chapters in this guidebook are aimed at helping you gain confidence to control your high blood pressure. Chapter 6 contains personal stories from people with high blood pressure. Chapters 7 and 8 talk about who can help you gain confidence and take control. And Chapter 9 will help you make a commitment to stay healthy.



Chapter 6.

Personal Success Stories of People with Hypertension

In this section you read the stories of people with high blood pressure. You will also find out about lifestyle choices they are making to improve their heart health and see how they control their high blood pressure.



Name: Charles Owusu

Age: 42 years old

Blood Pressure: 150/96 mmHg

What are some steps you will take to lower your high blood pressure?

"For one thing, my doctor says I've got to cut down on the sodium in my diet, so my goal is to really watch what I eat. Salt and sodium make blood pressure rise. People of African origin are especially sensitive to salt, so I've got to be more careful - especially at lunch, when I usually grab a hamburger and fries. Besides the fat, that meal has lots of salt."

How will you achieve your blood pressure goals?

"No more grabbing a burger and fries at a fast food joint for lunch, starting now. My wife Patty already volunteered to fix some new recipes - if I help."

What's your toughest challenge?

"I'm always on the run at lunchtime, and I've got to figure out some good options besides fast food."

Charles' Top Ten Ways To Make And Keep Healthy Changes

"Sticking to a good diet and engaging in regular physical activity hasn't been easy. Here's my top-ten list of ideas that really helped keep me motivated."

- 1. I give myself a reward. For every week that I stick to my diet and fit in some physical activity, I get to rent a movie of my choice for the weekend.*
- 2. I try to do different things during the week to keep me moving. I like to walk during the day and play football with friends in the evenings. On the weekend, I clean the bathroom and my car or take a walk with my wife.*
- 3. On days when I know my schedule will be busy, I try to get a little physical*

activity first thing in the morning, before I leave for work. At first it's tough to wake up earlier, but it gives me extra energy during the day.

4. I set a goal for each week. At the beginning of the week, I try to challenge myself to do just a little bit better this week - drink water instead of coke, or walk a quicker mile.
5. I cut back on processed foods. They account for most of the salt we eat.
6. I took the salt shaker and aromats off the table. At first, I kept reaching for it, but I'm hoping that out of sight will be out of mind.
7. Every week, my wife Patty and I try to make a meal using spices instead of salt. This week, we're trying Italian herbs - oregano, basil, and parsley.
8. I speak up at restaurants now. I started asking which dishes had a lot of salt, and whether the chef would make something for me with no salt. You'd be surprised - most of them have been pretty nice about it.
9. I made arrangements with a friend for a 30 minutes evening walk every day.
10. Most important - I got help. My wife has helped encourage me every day. She doesn't nag, but her reminders get me going.



Name: Patty Osei

Age: 55 years old

Blood Pressure: 160/100 mmHg

Why are you concerned about high blood pressure?

"I'm diabetic and I have high blood pressure. My doctor told me that those are two big risk factors for heart disease, and that's a killer. I want to be able to enjoy life with my husband, Kofi, and our 7 grandchildren!"

What are some steps you will take to lower your high blood pressure?

"I want to learn how to cook my favorite foods in a healthier way to keep my blood sugar and blood pressure under control."

How will you achieve your blood pressure goals?

"I saw a nice dietitian who is helping me cook healthier, and Kofi and the kids have promised to start walking with me."

What is your toughest challenge?

"I want to eat my traditional dishes - fufu with light soup- but make them healthier. My doctor said I had to lose some weight to help bring down my blood pressure and help my diabetes. I'm afraid that'll mean a diet with none of the foods I like. But then my doctor explained to me that many Ghanaian foods are already healthy, like beans, rice, and plantain. With a few tips, I can learn how to make all my favorite recipes healthier. He even gave me a booklet and a good Website with Ghanaian recipes."

"With both high blood pressure and diabetes, I've got to be really careful about taking my medicine. Sometimes things get so busy that I need help remembering when to check my blood sugar and when to take my blood pressure pills. My husband, Kofi, has been great about helping to remind me."



Name: Kwasi Brenya

Age: 42 years old

Blood Pressure: 155/92 mmHg

Why are you concerned about high blood pressure?

"I have two children in Ghana, but I have two here of 6 and 4½ ... When I die in Ghana I know my father and mother is there. My family is big there. My only problem is just my pressure. Sometimes, when it's gone, I like to stay here. To let my children, the ones born here, get the education here. But the moment it's coming and I start getting worried, I like to go home. I've got to keep my blood pressure in control and stay healthy for my own children. I'm taking better care of myself, starting now!"

What are some steps you will take to avoid getting high blood pressure?

"This year, my New Year's Resolution was to take my pills every day and to START exercising."

How will you achieve your blood pressure goals?

"I used my telephone to remember me on my medication and I even asked my doctor for some help to start exercising. I also organized a lunchtime walking group at work."

What is your toughest challenge?

"I've tried to start exercising before, but I was afraid because I felt palpitations. An acquaintance used to play sport regularly. At some point during an indoor soccer match, he just collapsed. And he died! That made me think, I should take it easy with sport because of my high blood pressure. But my doctor says it is good to exercise even with high blood pressure.

I also find it hard to continue. No time! But now I drew up a plan of action and I put

an exercise bike in front of the television. Now, instead of just sitting on the couch, I can watch the evening news and get some physical activity.”

Share some of your experiences with your hypertension

1. What are some concerns you have about your high blood pressure?

2. What are some steps you would take to lower your blood pressure?

3. What are some of the challenges you face in adopting lifestyle changes?

Chapter 7.

Partnering with Your Doctor

"I told my doctor my problems, of what I am feeling, he didn't just talk at me, he listened to me."

"In the past I always thought that I could have a heart attack or a stroke if I were to play sport. After the doctor said that exercise is important, I started seeing sport as part of the treatment for high blood pressure."

"I have a good relationship with my doctors, because when you go they talk to you and they ask questions about how you are doing and they listen to you."

"Take your medicine on a regular basis but then if you find something wrong with it, go back to your doctor, take him the list of the medications that you tried, and tell him about the problems that you had and then maybe he might be able to find another dose."

Working with your doctor

You can gain control of your blood pressure by taking an active part in your care. One of the ways to become active in your care is to partner with your doctor to the get the best care. In addition you can solicit the help of a family member, relative or friend to assist you with your care. Your doctor is an important source of information and advice. It is very important that you develop a partnership with your doctor and that you take an active role in this partnership. If you have any questions about your high blood pressure, or if you have any symptoms that worry you, always ask your doctor. How to partner with your doctor is one of the most important things you need to know. Below are some questions to ask your doctor to help you get the most from talking or visiting with your doctor:

1. What is my blood pressure reading? (Ask your doctor to write it down for you.)
2. What is my goal blood pressure?
3. Is my blood pressure under adequate control?
4. Is my systolic pressure too high (over 140)?
5. What would be a healthy weight for me?
6. Is there a diet to help me lose weight (if I need to) and lower my blood pressure?



7. Is there a recommended healthy eating plan I should follow to help lower my blood pressure (if I don't need to lose weight)?
8. Is it safe for me to start doing regular physical activity?
9. Be sure to tell your doctor about all medications (prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, herbal remedies) you are currently taking. This information is important as it may influence the type and dose of medication your doctor prescribes.
10. What is the name of my blood pressure medication? Is that the brand name or the generic name?
11. What are the possible side effects of my medication? (Be sure the doctor knows about any allergies you have and any other medications you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and dietary supplements.)
12. What time of day should I take my blood pressure medicine?
13. Should I take it with food?
14. Are there any foods, beverages or dietary supplements I should avoid when taking this medicine?
15. What should I do if I forget to take my blood pressure medicine at the recommended time? Should I take it as soon as I remember or should I wait until the next dosage is due?

Getting involved with your care

1. Write down some ways you would better get involved in your care

2. Make a list of questions for you to ask the doctor the next time you see him or her

Chapter 8.

Working with Your Support System

“People I thought were just casual friends, friends from the job turned out to be some of the most helpful people.”

“With my family, there is someone to listen and get it off your chest.”

“Well, I am a very active woman. I belong to a youth group. I have my church, I have my family, I have my friends, so I just stay busy.”

“The church is helping me with my blood pressure, because once a week we go to exercise training. That is helping me. I think that church... they know it very well.”

Your doctor is an important source of information and advice. It is very important that you develop a partnership with your doctor and that you take an active role in this partnership.

- Keep in touch with your doctor.
- Be sure to tell your doctor about all medications (prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, herbal remedies) you are currently taking. This information is important as it may influence the type and dose of medication your doctor prescribes.
- Make a note of any side effects associated with your medications and report them to your doctor.
- Ask questions if your doctor does not explain what is going on in a way that you can understand.

In addition to your doctor, friends and family can be an important source of information and guidance. Here are some ways others can help you to get control of your high blood pressure.

Family Support

Let your family know you have high blood pressure. This is important because high blood pressure tends to run in the family. It is a good idea for other members of your family, age 20 and older, to get their blood pressure checked as well.

It is also good to let your family know you have high blood pressure because:

- They can help you follow your doctor's advice.
- They can remind you to take your medication.
- Everyone can benefit from a low-fat, low salt diet.

Support at work

In some cases it may be important to let your supervisor or colleagues at work know you have high blood pressure. This may help them understand that you have to take medication, need to go to the doctor for check ups, try to stick to a healthy diet and need to move regularly.

Chapter 9.

Making a Contract with Myself

In order to taking control of high blood pressure you have to have the confidence and make the commitment to do it. Earlier in this guidebook we provided some suggestions on how you can gain confidence to control your high blood pressure. This section focuses on how making a contract with yourself can help you to make the commitment to take control of your blood pressure.

What is a health behavior contract?

We often think of a contract as a legal document that people draft between themselves and their lawyers. A contract can also be a document that you develop to make a commitment to live healthier.

A health behavior contract is a contract that you make with yourself that describes how you plan to make a change in your health, for example, taking your medication for high blood pressure, exercising more, or watching your diet. You can make a contract with a family member, friend, co-worker, or your physician.



Getting started with your contract

The first step in making a health behavior contract is to have a well thought out and realistic plan on what you are going to do to take control of your health. A health behavior contract should include a statement on how you are going to do it, who will help you to achieve your goal, and what you will do if you meet challenges in achieving your goal.

Making certain the contract works for you

Once you have written the contract, read it carefully and see if fits your personal style. Ask yourself, “How certain am I that I can meet the goals of this contract?” Rate yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being totally uncertain and 10 being totally certain.



Getting help from others

Share your plans with your family members and friends. Tell them what they can do to help you stick to your plan. Also share with them what may be unhelpful to you.

Review your contract on a regular basis

It is important to make sure your plan is realistic and works for you. If you find that you are able to meet your goals, choose healthy ways to reward yourself. If you find it challenging to complete your goals, then reevaluate your contract. Don't blame yourself or feel guilty.

You may need to make some adjustments to it. Remember, like other contracts, a health behavior contract may need to be reevaluated and renegotiated.



Gaining Control of High Blood Pressure

Contract Form

This contract should contain the following:

1. *What I am going to do.*
2. *When I am going to do it.*
3. *How often I am going to do it.*
4. *How much I am going to take.*

For example:

"I will take my once-a-day blood pressure medicine in the morning, seven days a week."

WHAT	WHEN	HOW OFTEN	HOW MUCH

I will:

(Do what)	
(When)	
(How often)	
(How much)	

How certain am I that I will do this?

(On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being totally uncertain and 10 being totally certain.)

Progress Report

When did I do the activity?	How did it go? Any comments or problems?

Chapter 10.

Getting More Information



The chapters in this guidebook contain information that we hope will be useful to you, but you may want more. If you do, there are other resources for people with hypertension. But remember, if you have questions, the best source of information is always your doctor.

Your local library and bookstores will have shelves full of books about heart disease, diet, exercise, and treatments. The internet is also a good source of information. Many websites now exist for people with heart disease who are seeking information. Below are some Websites where you can get additional information.

Interesting Websites for people with high blood pressure

Ghana

- **Ultimate nutrition**
<http://nutrition.myjoyonline.com/>

USA

- **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute NHLBI Health Information Center**
 - Guide to lower your blood pressure: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/hbp_low/hbp_low.pdf
 - The DASH eating plan: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/new_dash.pdf
 - Homepage: www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- **American Heart Association National Center**
 - Homepage: <http://www.hearthub.org/hc-high-blood-pressure.htm>
 - Low sodium recipes: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=572>

United Kingdom

- **Department of health**
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Longtermconditions/Vascular/Bloodpressure/index.htm>
- **Blood Pressure Association**
<http://www.bpassoc.org.uk/BloodPressureandyou/Thebasics>
 - Low sodium recipes: <http://www.bpassoc.org.uk/microsites/salt/Home/Low-saltrecipes/Mediterraneanfishcasserole>

Netherlands

- **Patiëntenplatform spreekuur thuis**

Website: http://www.spreekuurthuis.nl/themas/hoge_bloeddruk/informatie/de_behandeling

- **Voedingscentrum (in English)**

Website: <http://www.voedingscentrum.nl/nl/voedingscentrum/english.aspx>

- **Nederlandse Hartstichting**

Website: http://www.hartstichting.nl/risicofactoren/hoge_bloeddruk/wat_is_hoge_bloeddruk/

Additional file 1.

Diet recommendations for Ghanaian citizens in the Netherlands with high blood pressure

General

High blood pressure is not a disease, but it does result in a greater disposition to cardio-vascular disease. This is what we call one of the risk factors for cardio-vascular disease. Being over your recommended weight and having a high blood cholesterol condition are also commonly occurring and recognized risk factors. All of these risk factors can be influenced by diet and hence deserve special attention. The significance of this brochure is to discuss the role of a proper diet in relation to lowering blood pressure.

If your blood pressure is too high, your doctor will recommend that you use less salt in your daily consumption. Salt consists of sodium (Na, in abbreviated form) and chlorine (Cl, in abbreviated form). Sodium influences the blood pressure. A salt restricted diet thus really means a sodium restricted diet. Reducing salt in the diet does not result in lowering the blood pressure for everyone. Nevertheless, it is important to lower your salt consumption and this concerns everyone, as it aids the action of prescribed medication. Research has determined that a sodium restricted diet usually is effective for people with an African heritage. Thus it is very important, for you in particular, to reduce the intake of salt in your diet.

Ghanaian feeding habits

Just as in other cultures, food consumption plays an important role in Ghanaian culture. Excessive eating and drinking has a prominent place at most events. The Ghanaian kitchen includes substantial use of ingredients with excessively added salt. Salt is also regularly added during the preparation of meals, usually in the form of added ingredients, such as seasoning (oxo or maggi) cubes and seasoning salt.





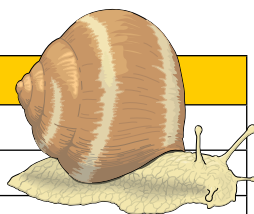
Sodium rich products

- Smoked chicken, salted beef, salted fish, salted herring, smoked herring.
- Marinates, ketjap, ketchup, Picalilly, Maggi cubes, seasoning salt.
- Cheese, sausages, smoked meat.
- Chips and other snacks.

Products with a healing factor?

It is claimed that some Ghanaian food products have a healing factor with respect to high blood pressure or other illnesses. This healing effect has not been proven however and it is also not known exactly how much needs to be used. Because the products are common vegetables and fruit, there is no concern regarding the use of these products. The table below shows some common examples.

Food product	Effect
Palmnut	Improves sight
Abedruo	Blood purification
Perekese	Blood purification
Bowen (bitter leaf)	Lowers blood pressure
Kontomere	Promotes the production of blood constituents
Akporfee (periwinkle) and snail	Strengthens bones



Beware: the claimed effects are not proven.



Sodium reduction

It will take a minimum of two weeks to get used to food with less added salt. Therefore give it time. It is a good idea to add a little less salt every day.

Tips for the preparation of meals

- Use some sambal, if you like (with no added salt).
- Grill the meat to add extra flavour.
- Choose mixed dishes, for example meat and vegetables.
- Use fresh herbs to add flavour to the meal, for example ginger, cellery, garlic, laurel, perekese.
- Marinate meat, chicken or fish for several hours prior to cooking, so it will absorb the flavour.
- Don't overcook vegetables. Canned vegetables contain more salt, choose fresh or frozen vegetables instead.
- When preparing soups add some additional Ghanaian vegetables and cellery, pimento seeds, abedruo, and just before the soup is ready add an entire pepper for added flavour.

Sodium reduced products

Examples of cheese having less added salt are Maaslander, Emmertaler and Gruyere. Different varieties of cheese are often available as a product with less added salt. Some supermarkets carry a variety of sodium reduced products, for example low sodium ketjap, seasoning salt, ketchup, peanutbutter. In these products regular salt has usually been replaced by diet-salt.

Sodium substitutes (diet-salt)

“Low salt” products, that use sodium substitutes, contain a lot of potassium. Potassium is important for maintaining normal blood pressure, but high amounts of potassium are harmful to the body. Certain drugs prescribed to prevent high blood pressure have as a characteristic that they prevent the excretion of potassium. Using “diet-salt” and a potassium rich diet is not recommended when you are using such prescription drugs. Your doctor or dietician can give further recommendations.

The table below shows the sodium and potassium content of several common Ghanaian products.

	Sodium (mg)	Potassium (mg)
Vegetables		
100 g Garden egg raw	3	279
100 g Eggplant raw	10	200
100 g Cabbage raw	10	300
100 g Chinese string beans raw	6	233
100 g Okra raw	3	282
100 g Pumpkin raw	0	130
100 g Kontomere raw	9	960
100 g Tomato raw	10	256
100 g Tomato canned	100	265
Fruits		
100 g Orange	0	154
100 g Plums	0	197
100 g Plums dried	10	860
100 g Pear	1	112
100 g Melon water-	0	158
100 g Melon sugar	20	350
100 g Mango	1	143
100 g Mandarine	2	134
100 g Grapes	0	203
100 g Banana	1	358
100 g Avocado	3	377
100 g Apple	2	121

	Sodium (mg)	Potassium (mg)
Carbohydrate sources		
100 g Potatoes boiled	2	441
100 g Plantain raw	0	385
100 g Bataat, sweet potatoes boiled	32	300
100 g Bread, brown-, white-	531	274
100 g Cassava raw	5	330
100 g Macaroni prepared	2	19
100 g Corn (Maize) prepared without salt	1	250
100 g Corn flour (Maize flour-)	1	285
100 g Rice parboiled prepared	3	20
100 g Rice white prepared	3	17
100 g Rice brown- prepared	9	99
100 g Koko yam prepared	3	200
100 g Yam prepared	17	260

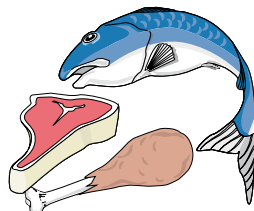


	Sodium (mg)	Potassium (mg)
Meat(products), fish and cheese		
100 g Shrimps, salted, dried	4330	500
100 g Herring smoked	1625	280
100 g Herring salted	1089	292
100 g Cheese 48+ sodium free	145	600
100 g Cheese Goudse 48+	932	82
100 g Smoked beef (sandwich variety, salted)	3100	268
100 g Sardines oil-, canned	337	368
100 g Bacon breakfast-	803	201
100 g Sausage smoked	832	220
100 g Sausage cervelate-	1358	302
100 g Salmon smoked	1140	415
Snacks		
100 g Chips	406	1048
100 g Frikadel	1100	196
100 g Cake butter-	191	112
Other products		
100 g Butter salted	400	27
100 g Butter unsalted	5	27
100 g Seasoning salt	23610	26
100 g Seasoning salt, low sodium	63	13000
100 g Ketchup tomato-	1190	350
100 g Ketjap sweet	4845	485
100 g Ketjap sweet, low sodium	28	6300
100 g Ketjap salty	5653	500
100 g Mayonaise	305	22
100 g Peanutbutter	250	537
100 g Piccalilly	1200	55
100 g Sauce saté- home made	656	263
100 g Salt	40000	0
100 g Salt, diet	0	24000

Healthy life styles

Wholesome food is a component of a healthy life style and living well. A healthy daily diet for an adult could consist of:

- 5-7 slices of brown or whole wheat bread.
- 3-5 serving spoons of rice or 1 large plantain or 3 pieces of cassava or yam.
- 3-4 ladels of vegetables.
- 2 servings of fruit.
- 2-3 glasses of 2% or skim milk or milk products.
- 1-2 slices of low salt cheese.
- 1-2 slices of lean sandwich meats.
- A 100 g serving of lean meat, chicken or fish (fresh weight).
- 5 g of diet margarine per slice of bread.
- 1 tablespoon of oil or lard, used for the preparation of a hot meal.
- At least 1½ litres of fluids.



A menu for the day like the one shown above supplies sufficient amounts of the body's daily requirement of essential nutrients. Many Ghanaians consume predominantly Ghanaian vegetables. Because these are more expensive than Dutch vegetables, people often don't eat enough vegetables. It is a good idea to try Dutch vegetables sometime. You can prepare these, as you are used to, Ghanaian style. You can read more about a healthy life style in the box below

Additional recommendations for healthy ways to live

Sufficient exercise

Regular exercise conditions the body. A daily walk of half an hour is sufficient, you don't have to join a gym, necessarily. Gardening, getting off the bus one stop earlier than usual, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator are good alternative choices. This can help with lowering blood pressure.

Reduce the consumption of saturated fats

The presence of excessive saturated fats in your diet can elevate the level of 'bad' (LDL) cholesterol in the blood. This leads to a greater predisposition for cardio-vascular disease. Saturated fats are common in meat and animal products. An exception is fish. Fish has an abundance of unsaturated oils and fatty acids (good fat).

Unsaturated fats promote higher levels of good (HDL) cholesterol in the blood, which reduces the chance for cardio-vascular disease. Unsaturated fats occur predominantly in vegetable products. Exceptions are red palm oil, coconut oil and coco (cacao). These products contain saturated fats instead and their intake should therefore be limited.

Correct your body weight

People with excessive body weight often also have high blood pressure. Losing a few pounds can help reduce blood pressure. Responsible consumption of fats and adequate exercise help to control your weight.

Importance of sufficient exercise, relaxation and stress reduction

Regular exercise produces a well toned body and additionally reduces stress. It promotes good health and can help to reduce high blood pressure.

Misconceptions

There exists a common misconception that the body, especially the bones, will weaken if no salt is added to meals. The addition of salt to food really is superfluous, as all food naturally contains some salt.

If you have questions remaining after reading this brochure or are in need of personal advice concerning your diet, you may consult the dietist. To meet with the dietist you will need a referral from your specialist or G.P.

Important addresses

- GGD has VETC's, these are consultants from the same background and culture as the patients.
- Ghanaian radio stations regularly broadcast programs with discussions on health themes.
- **AFAPAC Foundation**
Telephone: 020 600 34 54 or
www.afapac.nl
- **De Nederlandse Hartstichting** (*The Dutch Heart Institute*)
Telephone: 0900 3000 300 or
www.hartstichting.nl
- **Voedingscentrum** (*Food Central*)
Telephone: 070 306 88 88 or
www.voedingscentrum.nl

Additional file 2.

Common questions and concepts of patients with high blood pressure

High Blood Pressure - Hypertension - Mogya broso - Heebroedoe



This pamphlet is intended to support your consultation with the physician or doctors' assistant. It is not only important that you read the information carefully, but also that you discuss your questions.

This pamphlet was put together as the result of a number of discussions with patients with high blood pressure. Possibly you will recognize some of these questions and remarks by other patients?

This pamphlet can help to clarify your own questions and makes it easier to discuss them with your family, doctor or doctors' assistant. Please read and consider this pamphlet in combination with the others about high blood pressure!

Your personal questions and concerns about high blood pressure are important!

If you have high blood pressure, you will get advice from a physician or doctors' assistant. Nevertheless, patients often have questions about these recommendations. Sometimes the Dutch language is difficult to understand or instructions included with your medication. Sometimes the information about high blood pressure may be quite different depending on the source, for example, as given by family or through radio and TV programmes. Because of this, patients may have questions about the recommendations of the physician. Patients may have doubts about the side effects of the prescribed medication.

Please, do not be ashamed about your concerns, your personal perceptions or doubts. On the contrary, it is very important that you discuss these with us. This way you can search for a solution together. If necessary we can call for assistance, from a translator for instance.

What is high blood pressure?

Common questions:

- Is it a disease?
- Why do I have it?
- Can I feel it?
- Is it dangerous, what can happen, when?

Current opinions

“And then that blood enters your brain or comes to your head. And then it wants to get out. It has to get away somehow, somewhere.”

Patients themselves often view high blood pressure as a disease. They often believe that there may be immediate severe consequences, as soon as the blood pressure rises. Patients often compare it to an “overfilled bicycle tire or balloon”, which can explode at any given moment. Many patients say that they can feel variations in blood pressure.

Doctors don’t view high blood pressure as an independent disease. They also think that it is something you cannot feel. This is often not very clear to patients. People who have emigrated often think that their elevated blood pressure is caused by the new circumstances in Netherlands. For example, because of the stress or as a consequence of the colder Dutch climate. Therefore it is often viewed as a temporary condition.

Prescription Medicine

Common questions:

- For how long do I need to use the medication?
- Am I cured once my blood pressure has returned to normal?
- Can I stop taking the drugs?
- Are there side-effects?
 - Does it influence my sex life?
 - Can I get addicted to it?
- Is there an alternative to drug treatment?

Current concepts

“When I was in Ghana I didn’t take the medication. But here, I come and the pressure is going high! Because the situation here, stress: you have to think about your tax and everything??”

Patients often have difficulty with the obligation of using medicine. Especially if this is a long term commitment. These concerns are not often discussed with the physician. Some examples follow, perhaps you recognize them?

- Patients can be concerned about side effects (physical complaints resulting from the use of prescription drugs). They sometimes believe that once they have begun with medication, they will need to take progressively more. Also that they can become addicted to it.
- Sometimes patients decide to stop taking their prescribed medication, on their own

accord. For example because they have no more complaints of high blood pressure. Alternatively because they believe that it has been cured. For example when their blood pressure is at normal level during a check-up.

- Patients sometimes prefer other methods of treatment, which are not directly endorsed by the attending physician. For example homeotherapy or acupuncture. Every culture has its particular traditions. Dutch citizens of Ghanaian heritage often have a vast knowledge of native herbs and home remedies. An example is Perekesese. Known home remedies are garlic tea, cellery, cucumber and lime. Usually these remedies are taken in combination with prescription medicine, but sometimes they are taken for a substitute.
- Money problems may on occasion prevent the purchase of prescription drugs.

Physicians and doctors' assistants are interested in such cases and consider it important that you discuss these matters with them!

Life style

Common questions:

- How does life style influence high blood pressure?
- Can exercise lead to problems concerning high blood pressure?

Current concepts

- Patients suffering from high blood pressure are often advised to change their food consumption pattern, to reduce weight and to exercise more. However, many patients question why this is necessary.
- It is not easy to follow the given life style recommendations consistently. Understandably so, because you are often occupied with a busy career, single parenthood, religious and/or financial obligations, which take priority and demand a great commitment of time.
- Someone with high blood pressure is often concerned that a blood vessel could suddenly burst for example if he/she were to exercise. There is no need to worry about this.
- What can also be problematic is that the recommendations are not adjusted to your lifestyle. For example, the recommendation to reduce salt intake; considering that a lot of salt is used the preparation of certain Ghanaian dishes in particular. The reduction of salt intake is critically important for people of African descent with high blood pressure, because the blood pressure of these people often reacts very strongly to salt. Recommendations concerning exercise often do not fit with the patterns of daily life either.

For example, not everyone knows how to ride a bicycle or can swim. It will be even more difficult for someone who has an automobile, to walk for groceries or go shopping by bicycle, especially if it is a typical “rainy day”.

- Furthermore, the healthier habits and traditions of yesteryear have often been changed by the convenience of the “modern world of today”. For example, the use of a much fresh (tropical) fruit and vegetables, which is very important for people with high blood pressure. The high price of these wholesome products can be a problem. Nevertheless, there are often cheaper replacement food products to be found.

Questions of your own?

Have any questions come up after reading this pamphlet, or are there any other questions that you would like answered? The other pamphlets about high blood pressure will answer many questions for you. Most importantly, please discuss your questions or concerns, with us on your next visit! The physician or doctors’ assistant could give you an answer or look for a solution with you.

It may be of help if you write down the questions beforehand.

Please write your questions	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	

Notes

[illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

