

High Blood Pressure...My Story

Alison , 45 was diagnosed with high blood pressure and last year on a routine check-up with her GP.

My health complaint

"I didn't have any symptoms and was completely oblivious to my health condition - high blood pressure, which is known as the "silent killer" because often the first time you realise you have it is when you have a heart attack. Fortunately, in my case it was detected in time and I could do something about it.

I'd never really thought about having my blood pressure checked until a close friend of mine had a heart attack without any prior warning, luckily he survived but it made me realise how important it is to have regular checks.

I had an inkling I could be at risk because I was overweight , didn't exercise and had quite a stressful lifestyle - working shifts to fit in around looking after my two kids as I'm a single mum.

My surgery was offering free health checks for adults aged 40-74 so I decided now was as good a time as any to get myself checked out. The nurse took my blood pressure and it was slightly above the recommended level. Because of my lifestyle the nurse informed me I was at an increased risk of heart disease."

Treatment

"Because my blood pressure was only slightly above the recommended level I could try diet and lifestyle changes first, to try and bring it down, without the need for medication.

As my kids are only 11 and 13 it suddenly dawned on me that I could be risking not seeing them grow up and having families of their own and this spurred me on to make some changes."

What I did

"I didn't do it all overnight but tried to gradually change my lifestyle. The things I tried included:

- **Cutting down on salt:** *"I didn't realise how much salt was in processed food and leading a busy lifestyle I tended to rely on these types of foods as they were quick and easy. I now try to cook from scratch as much as possible and avoid things such as ready meals."*

Part of the "...my story" series

- **Taking more exercise:** *"This was the most daunting, as I'm so short of time, but somehow I've managed to fit in about 30 minutes at least three times a week. I've started cycling to work (something my kids found hilarious) and I meet my sister every Sunday morning to do a Zumba class. I know I've still got a way to go but I'm happy I've found something I enjoy which I didn't think I would."*
- **Managing stress:** *"Fitting exercise into my routine has helped me to manage my stress levels and has given me more energy so I find I can concentrate more at work. It's also now my way of socializing and having a group of people around me especially in my zumba class is great fun and I always come out smiling. If I'm having a stressful day at work I try to go outside at lunchtime either for a walk or just to get some fresh air which helps to calm me down."*
- **Losing weight:** *"Doing all of the above has helped me lose weight which I needed to do because being overweight raises your blood pressure. I also joined a slimming club with a friend to help me stay motivated and have lost 18lbs."*

Where I am now

"My doctor is really pleased with me as my blood pressure is now in the healthy range again and I've lost a lot of weight and am feeling fitter and healthier in general.

I'm now a dress size 14 where as I was an 18 a year ago – I look and feel so much better and the slimmer and fitter I get the more I want to stay this way . If someone had told me a year ago I could turn my life around like this I wouldn't have believed them, but by tackling my health in bite sized chunks I gradually shed my old unhealthy lifestyle without too much effort."