

SECTION 7: HYPERTENSION (High Blood Pressure)

High blood pressure, or hypertension, rarely has noticeable symptoms, but if untreated, it increases the risk of serious problems such as heart attacks and strokes. More than one in four adults in the UK have high blood pressure, although many won't realise it. The only way to find out if blood pressure is high is to have it checked. It is a leading cause of premature death globally. It is common, costly to the NHS, and often goes undiagnosed – on average, each CCG will have 26,000 residents with undiagnosed hypertension. At least half of all heart attacks and strokes are caused by high blood pressure and it is a major risk factor for chronic kidney disease and cognitive decline.

Causes and Risk factors

It's not always clear what causes high blood pressure, but certain things can increase the risk. These can include:-

- Being over the age of 65
- Being overweight or obese
- Being of African or Caribbean descent
- Have a family history of high blood pressure
- Eating too much salt
- Not eating enough fruit and vegetables
- Not doing enough exercise
- Drinking too much alcohol or coffee (or other caffeine-based drinks)
- Smoking
- Having disturbed or not enough sleep

In about 1 in 20 cases, high blood pressure occurs as the result of an underlying condition, medication or drug.

Conditions that can cause high blood pressure include:

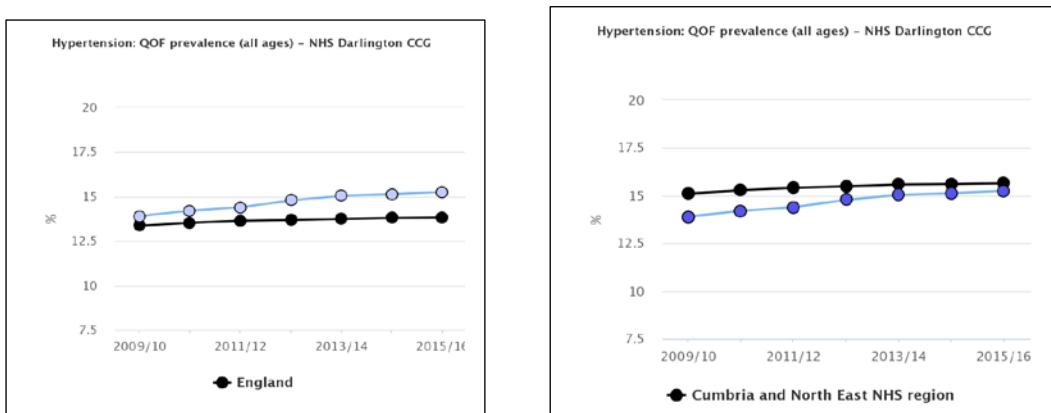
- kidney disease
 - glomerulonephritis – damage to the tiny filters inside the kidneys
 - narrowing of the arteries supplying the kidneys
- diabetes
- long-term kidney infections
- obstructive sleep apnoea – a condition in which the walls of the throat relax and narrow during sleep, interrupting normal breathing
- hormone problems – such as an underactive thyroid, an overactive thyroid, cushing's syndrome, acromegaly, increased levels of the hormone aldosterone (hyperaldosteronism) and phaeochromocytoma
- lupus – a condition in which the immune system attacks parts of the body such as the skin, joints and organs

- scleroderma – a condition that causes thickened skin, and sometimes problems with organs and blood vessels

Some medicines and drugs can increase blood pressure including:

- the combined oral contraceptive pill
- steroid medication
- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) – such as ibuprofen and naproxen
- some over-the-counter cough and cold remedies
- some herbal remedies – particularly those containing liquorice
- some recreational drugs – such as cocaine and amphetamines
- some selective serotonin-noradrenaline reuptake inhibitor (SSNRI) antidepressants

15.2% of the population in Darlington had been diagnosed with hypertension in 2015/16, which is statistically higher when compared to 13.8% nationally. The proportion of patients diagnosed with hypertension has increased both nationally and locally. In Darlington the proportion of those diagnosed has increased at a faster rate than England from 13.9% in 2009/10 to 15.2% in 2015/16. In keeping with the impression that a significant proportion of patients with hypertension are not known to services – data from 2014 for Darlington suggests an estimated prevalence of just over 25% when undiagnosed cases are taken into account.



In patients with diagnosed hypertension on treatment, blood pressure was kept below or equal to 150/90mmHg in 82.5% of patients, compared to 81.2% regionally and 79.6% nationally. 92% of patients aged 45 or over in Darlington CCG had had their blood pressure checked in the preceding five years. This is better than the national figure of 90.6%. In patients newly diagnosed with high blood pressure aged 30-74 with a cardiovascular risk score equal to or greater than 20%, 80% had been commenced on a statin as per NICE guidance, making Darlington the best performing CCG regionally and significantly better than the national rate of 66.5%.