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Back to basics



Dear Seafarer,

It is estimated that in the UK around eight out of ten people are affected by back pain at some time in their lives. Crew injuries caused by the strain of lifting, pulling and pushing objects in the dynamic environment of a moving ship remain one of the most common injury claims dealt with by the Club. For you, the seafarer, such an injury can affect your ability to carry out your work and impact on your lifestyle. The good news is that most back injuries are preventable and strengthening your back through exercise is one of the best ways to keep back pain at bay. Pick something you enjoy so that it is more likely to become a habit. You should aim to exercise three to five times a week for 30 minutes each time. In this edition we explore some exercise options as well as some safe lifting tips. Before carrying out any job remember to:

- Carry out a risk assessment
- Emphasise the correct methods of lifting and handling heavy loads at all safety meetings and toolbox talks
- Encourage exercise and stretching amongst your team

In this edition we also highlight cardiovascular related problems arising from high blood pressure as this is one of the most common illness claims handled by the Club. High blood pressure is often referred to as the "silent killer" – before the symptoms manifest themselves, the only way to know if you have it is to have your blood pressure checked. Your lifestyle plays an important role in both preventing and treating high blood pressure and what you can do about it is discussed in this edition together with a new feature – Cooks' Corner - which allows you to submit your favourite recipes to us to share with the Club's seafarers worldwide.

We also explore some facts about hydration and another common claim caused by chronic dehydration, namely kidney stones. Dehydration is usually caused by not drinking enough fluid to replace what we lose. The climate, the amount of physical exercise you are doing (particularly in hot weather) and your diet can contribute to dehydration.

If you have any questions or comments about the articles in this issue, please do not hesitate to contact us at the email address on the back cover.





Back injuries & lifting

Back pain can be caused by many work situations and it is more common in roles that involve:

Force: Exerting too much force on your back such as by lifting or moving heavy objects.

Repetition: Repeating certain movements, especially those that involve twisting or rotating your spine.

Preventing back pain

Keeping your back strong and supple is the best way to avoid getting back pain. Regular exercise, maintaining good posture and lifting correctly will all help.

Exercise

Exercise is both an excellent way of preventing back pain and of reducing it, but you should seek medical advice before starting an exercise programme if you've had back pain for six weeks or more.

Exercises such as walking or swimming strengthen the muscles that support your back without putting any strain on it or subjecting it to a sudden jolt.

Below are some simple exercises you can do several times a day to help prevent or relieve back pain.

- Bottom to heels stretch – kneel on all fours, with your knees under hips and hands under shoulders. Slowly take your bottom backwards, maintaining the natural curve in the spine. Hold the

stretch for one deep breath and return to the starting position. Repeat eight to 10 times.

- Knee rolls – lie on your back and place a small flat cushion or book under your head. Keep your knees bent and together, then roll them to one side while keeping both shoulders on the floor. Hold the stretch for one deep breath and return to the starting position. Repeat eight to 10 times, alternating sides.
- Back extensions – lie on your stomach, and prop yourself on your elbows. Arch your back up by pushing down on your hands. Breathe and hold for five to 10 seconds. Return to the starting position. Repeat eight to 10 times.

Stop these exercises immediately if they make your pain worse.

Factors such as aging, obesity and poor physical condition can all contribute to back pain, so also try to maintain a healthy weight and eat a nutritious diet, including making sure you are getting enough calcium and vitamin D which helps your bones.



Safe lifting tips

One of the biggest causes of back injury at work is lifting or handling objects incorrectly.

Learning and following the correct method for lifting and handling heavy loads can help to prevent injury and avoid back pain.



Check out these safe lifting and handling tips:

Know your limits

Don't lift or handle more than you can easily manage. There's a difference between what people can lift and what they can safely lift. If you're in doubt, seek advice or get help.

Think before you lift

Plan the lift. Where is the load going to be placed? Use appropriate handling aids where possible. Will help be needed with the load? Remove obstructions, such as discarded wrapping materials. For long lifts, such as from floor to shoulder height, consider resting the load mid-way on a table or bench to change your grip on it.

Keep the load close to the waist

Keep the load close to the waist for as long as possible while lifting. The distance of the load from the spine at waist height is an important factor in the overall load on the spine and back muscles. Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the body. If closely approaching the load isn't possible, try to slide it towards the body before trying to lift it.

Adopt a stable position

Your feet should be apart with one leg slightly forward to maintain balance (alongside the load if it's on the ground). Be prepared to move your feet during the lift in order to maintain a stable posture. Wearing over-tight clothing or unsuitable footwear may make this difficult.

Ensure a good hold on the load

Where possible, hug the load close to the body. This may be a better

option than gripping it tightly with the hands only.

Don't bend your back when lifting

A slight bending of the back, hips and knees at the start of the lift is preferable to either fully flexing the back (stooping) or fully flexing the hips and knees – in other words, fully squatting.

Don't flex the back any further while lifting

This can happen if the legs begin to straighten before starting to raise the load.

Don't twist when you lift

Avoid twisting the back or leaning sideways especially while the back is bent. Keep your shoulders level and facing the same direction as the hips. Turning by moving your feet is better than twisting and lifting at the same time.

Keep your head up

Keep your head up when handling the load. Look ahead, not down at the load once it has been held securely.

A load should always be carried in such a way that it does not obscure vision.

Move smoothly

Don't jerk or snatch the load as this can make it harder to keep control and can increase the risk of injury.

Lower down, then adjust

Put the load down and then adjust. If you need to position the load precisely, put it down first, then slide it into the desired position.

Hydration

There is a lot of confusion about hydration and how much fluid you should drink to keep your body healthy – when health experts talk about ‘water’ it is often the nutrient water which can be found in both the fluids we drink and eat, including drinking water.

How much water should we drink?

It depends on the individual's requirements and can vary from day to day as many different factors can affect the amount we need such as age, gender, body mass, ambient temperature and physical activity levels.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) recommends an intake of 2.5 litres of water for men and 2 litres for women per day, via food and drink. Of this, they suggest 70-80% should come from drinks and the remainder from food. Water is the best type of fluid to drink as it contains no sugar, calories or additives.

Dehydration

If you are dehydrated it means your body does not contain as much water as it requires – this is quantified as 1% or greater loss of body weight as a result of fluid loss.

Even without perspiration, the average adult normally turns over around 4% of total body weight in water each day.

Dehydration can result from losing too much fluid, for example, through not drinking enough water, sweating, vomiting or diarrhoea.

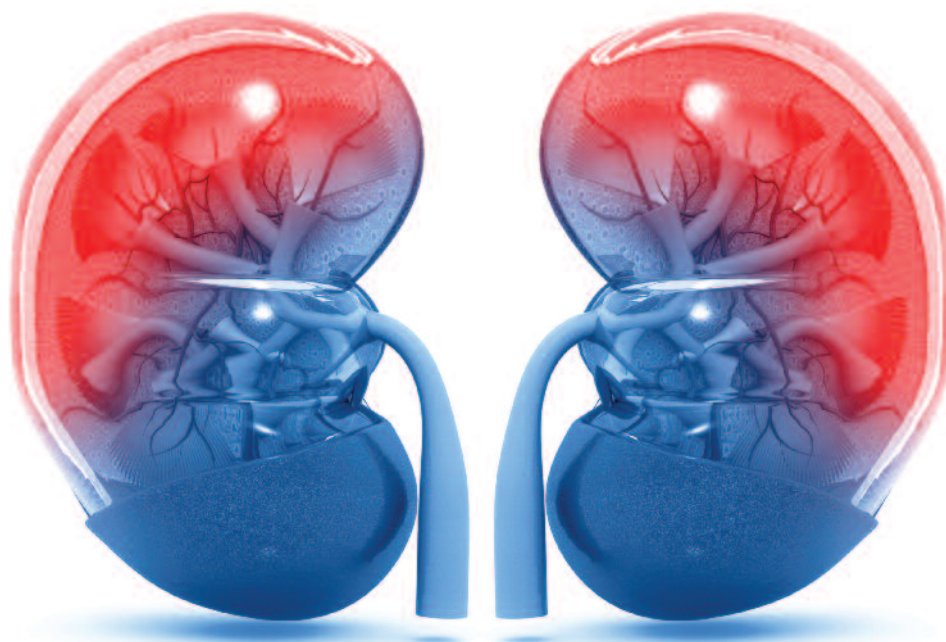
It can be classified as mild, moderate or severe, based on how much fluid is lost or not replaced.

Urine is used as a way of telling the fluid balance in the body – your urine should be pale and straw-coloured – if it's dark, you need to drink more fluids.

Your body has special mechanisms to make sure you stay hydrated such as feeling thirsty, which is your body's way of telling you that you need to drink more.

Symptoms of dehydration:

- Dark yellow or brown urine
- Dry, sticky mouth
- Few or no tears when crying
- Headache
- Increased thirst
- Muscle tiredness
- Sleepiness or tiredness
- Constipation
- Losing 2% or more of body weight as a result of fluid loss can also reduce your mental performance.



Kidney stones

If dehydration is ongoing (chronic), it can affect your kidney function and increase your risk of kidney stones.

What are kidney stones?

Kidney stones can develop in one or both kidneys and most often affect people aged 30 to 60 years.

They are quite common, with around 3 in 20 and up to 2 in 20 women developing them at some stage of their lives.

If they cause severe pain it is known as renal colic.

What causes kidney stones?

Waste products, such as too much calcium, in the blood can occasionally form crystals that collect inside the kidneys and over time the crystals may build up to form a hard stone-like lump. This is more likely to happen if you don't drink enough fluids, if you take certain medications or if you have

a condition that raises levels of certain substances in your urine.

After a kidney stone has formed, your body will try to pass it out when you go to the toilet – this means it will often travel through the urinary system (the kidneys, kidney tubes and bladder).

Symptoms of kidney stones

Small ones may go undetected and pass out painlessly in urine but it is quite common for a stone to block part of the urinary system such as the ureter, which connects the kidney to the bladder and the urethra, which is the tube that urine passes through on its way out of the body.

A blockage can cause severe pain and sometimes causes a urinary tract infection (UTI).

Symptoms include:

- Severe pain in the side and back, below the ribs
- Pain that spreads to the lower abdomen and groin
- Pain that comes in waves and fluctuates in intensity
- Pain on urination
- Pink, red or brown urine
- Cloudy or foul-smelling urine
- Nausea and vomiting
- Persistent need to urinate
- Urinating more often than usual
- Fever and chills if an infection is present
- Urinating small amounts of urine

Treating and preventing kidney stones

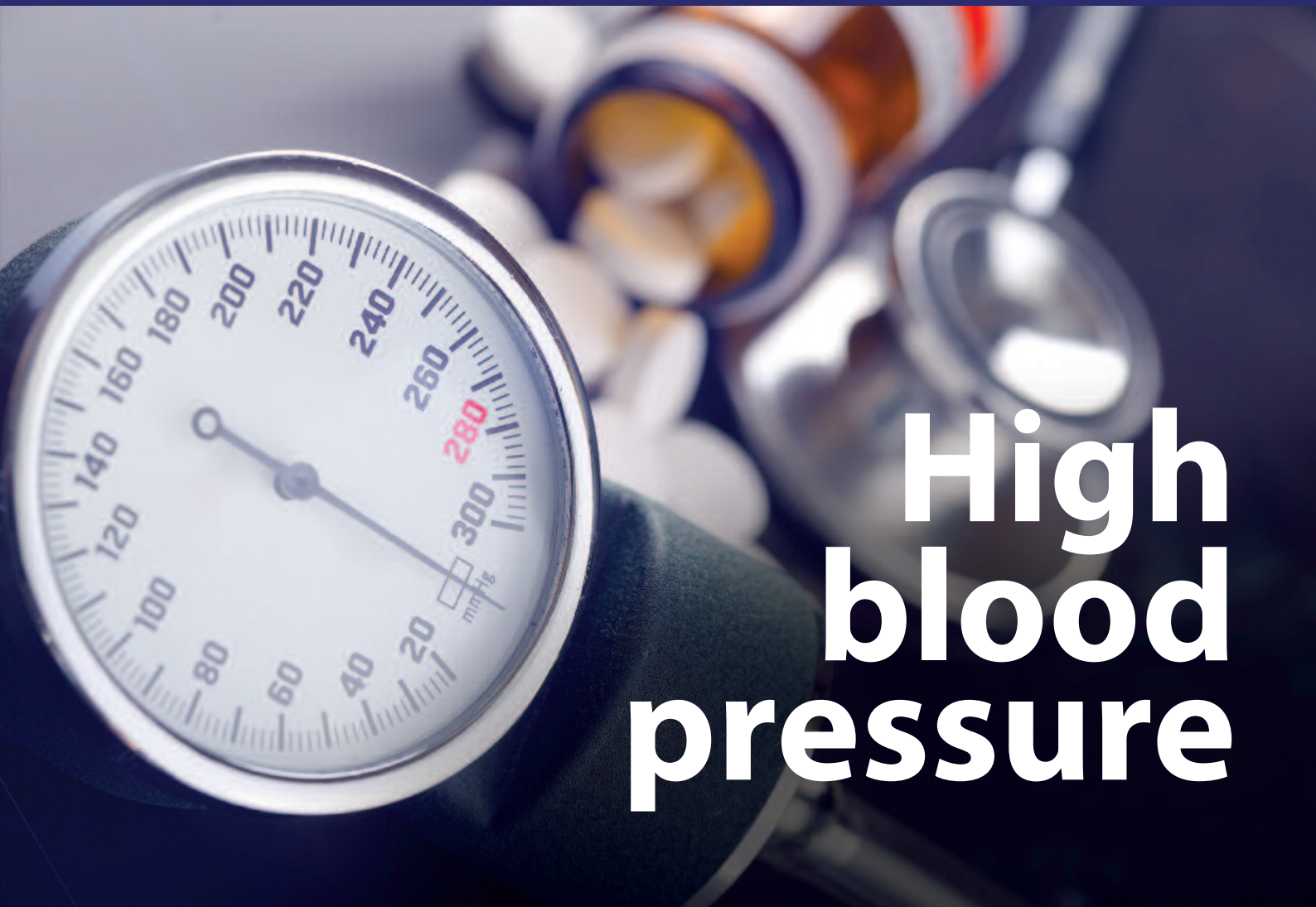
It may be possible to treat the symptoms of smaller stones with medication.

Larger stones may need to be broken up using ultrasound or laser surgery – sometimes keyhole surgery may be needed to remove very large kidney stones.

To avoid getting kidney stones, make sure you drink plenty of water every day so you don't become dehydrated. Drinks such as tea, coffee and fruit juice can count towards your fluid intake but water is the healthiest option.

You should also make sure you drink more when it's hot or when you're exercising to replenish fluids lost through sweating or when you are working in a hot environment, such as the engine room.

If your kidney stone is caused by too much calcium, you may be advised by your doctor to reduce the amount of oxalates in your diet – these can be found in foods such as beetroot, asparagus, rhubarb, chocolate, berries, leeks, parsley, celery, almonds, peanuts, cashews, soy products and grains such as oatmeal, wheat germ and wholewheat.



High blood pressure

High blood pressure (hypertension) often has no noticeable symptoms, but if untreated it increases your risk of heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease, stroke or dementia.

High blood pressure affects more than 1 in 4 adults and the only way of knowing there is a problem is to have your blood pressure checked.

All adults should have their blood pressure checked regularly. Having this done is easy and could save your life.

What is high blood pressure?

The Heart

The heart is a muscle about the size of your fist. It pumps blood around your body and beats approximately 70 times a minute. After the blood leaves the right side of the heart it goes to your lungs where it picks up oxygen. The oxygen-rich blood returns to your heart and is then pumped to the body's organs through a network of arteries. The blood returns to your heart through veins before being pumped back to your lungs again. This process is called circulation. A certain amount of pressure in your blood

vessels is needed to do this. However, if there is too much pressure in your blood vessels, it puts extra strain on your arteries and heart, which can lead to serious conditions such as heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease, stroke, or dementia.

Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg) and is recorded as two figures:

- systolic pressure – the pressure of the blood when your heart beats to pump blood out
- diastolic pressure – the pressure of the blood when your heart rests in between

beats, which reflects how strongly your arteries are resisting blood flow

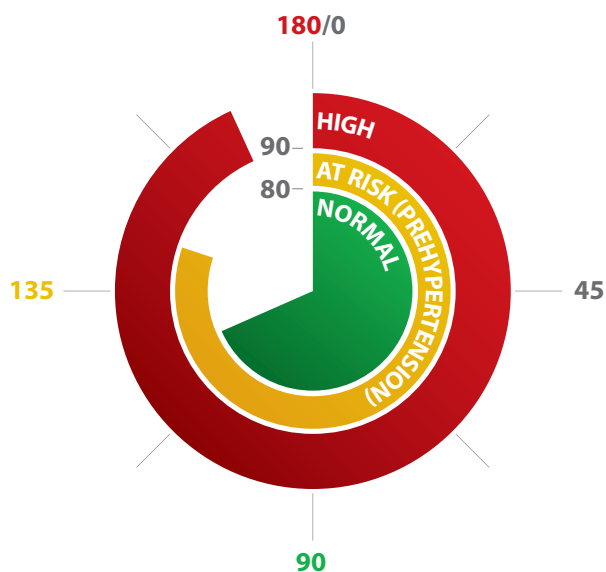
For example, if your doctor says your blood pressure is "140 over 90", or 140/90mmHg, it means you have a systolic pressure of 140mmHg and a diastolic pressure of 90mmHg.

A reading over 140/90mmHg indicates high blood pressure (medically known as hypertension) which should be confirmed by tests on separate occasions to reach a diagnosis.

A blood pressure reading below 120/80mmHg is considered to be ideal.

Blood Pressure Levels

Normal	Systolic: less than 120 mmHg Diastolic: less than 80 mmHg
At Risk (Prehypertension)	Systolic: 120–139 mmHg Diastolic: 80–89 mmHg
High	Systolic: 140 mmHg or higher Diastolic: 90 mmHg or higher



Who is most at risk?

Your chances of having high blood pressure increase as you get older. There isn't always a clear cause of high blood pressure but you are at increased risk if you:

- are aged over 65
- are overweight
- have a relative with high blood pressure
- eat too much salt
- don't eat enough fruit and vegetables
- don't do enough exercise
- drink too much alcohol
- drink too much coffee (or other caffeine-based drinks)
- smoke

If you fall into any of the groups listed above, consider making changes to your lifestyle to lower your risk of high blood pressure. Also, consider having your blood pressure checked regularly.



Preventing high blood pressure

High blood pressure can be avoided by eating healthily, maintaining a healthy weight, taking regular exercise, only drinking alcohol in moderation and not smoking. It is also important to manage existing conditions such as diabetes and also to manage stress levels. This was discussed in detail in our Health Watch edition last September available on the website : <http://www.britanniapandi.com/publications/health-watch/>

Diet

Cut down on the amount of salt in your food (remember that food such as soy contains high levels of salt). Salt raises your blood pressure and the more salt you eat, the higher your blood pressure. Aim to eat less than 6g (0.2oz) of salt a day, which is about a small teaspoonful. You don't have to add salt to your food to eat too much of it – around 75% of the salt that we eat is already in everyday foods such as bread, breakfast

cereal and readymade meals. Remember, don't add salt to your food automatically – always taste it first. Many people add salt out of habit but it's often unnecessary and your food will taste good without it.

For ideas of how to cook using less salt, see our 'Cooks' Corner' on page 8.

As well as cutting down on salt, remember to eat a low-fat diet that includes lots of fibre (such as wholegrain rice, bread and pasta) and plenty of fruit and vegetables – all these will

help to lower blood pressure. Fruit and vegetables are full of vitamins and minerals, together with fibre that all keep your body in good condition. Aim to eat five 80g portions of fruit and vegetables every day – the '5 A DAY' rule. As an approximate guide, one portion would be 3 to 4 tablespoons of cooked vegetables (tinned and frozen vegetables all count towards the 5 A DAY). For fruit, 1 portion is roughly 2 pieces of small fruit such as plums or 1 piece of larger fruit such as an apple.

Alcohol

Regularly drinking alcohol above the levels recommended by the government health authorities will raise your blood pressure over time. Staying within the recommended levels is the best way to reduce your risk of developing high blood pressure.

Recommended levels do vary from country to country but in the UK:

- Men and women are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week
- Spread your drinking over three days or more if you drink as much as 14 units a week (i.e. do not drink all the units on one or two days)

How many units of alcohol are in a drink will depend on the alcohol strength and the size of the drink. As a rough guide, in a can

of average strength beer, there will be two units. In a large glass of wine there will be 3 units. A single shot of spirits will be one unit. Also remember that alcohol is high in calories which will make you gain weight and increase blood pressure.

Weight

Being overweight forces your heart to work harder to pump blood around your body and this can raise your blood pressure. If you do need to lose some weight, it is worth remembering that losing just a few kilos or pounds will make a big difference to your blood pressure and to your overall health. It is important to maintain a healthy body mass index (BMI) calculated from your weight, height and age and can be done by your doctor at a medical or by following online calculators such as:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthyweightcalculator.aspx>

Exercise

Being active and taking regular exercise lowers blood pressure by keeping your heart and blood vessels in good condition. Regular exercise can also help you lose weight, which will also help lower your blood pressure.

You should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (such as

cycling or fast walking) every week. For it to count, the activity should make you feel warm and slightly out of breath. Someone who is overweight may only have to walk up a slope or a flight of stairs to get this feeling. Remember that you do not have to have access to a gym or a running track to take exercise, there are lots of online exercise programmes and ideas that can be done in a very small space and with no special equipment needed.

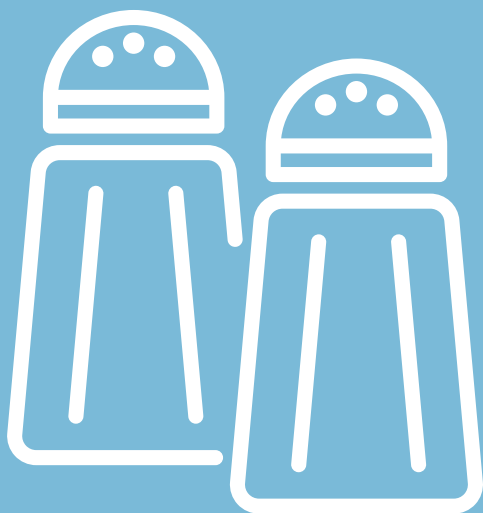
Smoking

Smoking doesn't directly cause high blood pressure, but it puts you at much higher risk of a heart attack and stroke. Smoking, like high blood pressure, will cause your arteries to narrow. If you smoke and have high blood pressure, your arteries will narrow much more quickly and your risk of heart or lung disease in the future is dramatically increased.

Caffeine

Drinking more than four cups of coffee a day may increase your blood pressure. If you are a big fan of coffee, tea or other caffeine-rich drinks (such as cola and some energy drinks) you should consider cutting down. It is fine to drink tea and coffee as part of a balanced diet, but it is important that these drinks are not your only source of fluid.

Cooks' corner



As you have been reading, eating too much salt can cause high blood pressure. Here are some ideas of how to cook with less salt. Many people add salt to food when they are cooking, but there are lots of ways to add flavour to your cooking without using any salt.

Check out these alternatives:

- Use black pepper as a seasoning instead of salt. Try it on pasta, eggs, pizza, fish and soup.
- Add fresh herbs and spices to pasta dishes, vegetables and meat. Use garlic, ginger, chilli and lime in stir fries instead of soy sauces which are very high in salt.
- Try baking or roasting vegetables such as red peppers, tomatoes, zucchini, fennel, parsnips and squash to bring out their flavour without adding salt.
- Make sauces using ripe (or tinned) tomatoes and garlic.

Why don't you send us your own ideas of ways in which you are trying to cook and to eat more healthily on board your ship?

We will be publishing your favourite recipes in future editions and we look forward to hearing from you.

Email your suggestions to the editor at: healthwatch@triley.co.uk

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