

Simple steps to better health

Health Watch is always looking at ways to raise awareness about health, encouraging you to keep an eye on your own health and to look out for the health of your fellow seafarers.

Over the past few years we have addressed a number of common health problems, both physical and mental. In the next two editions of Health Watch we will revisit 10 such medical conditions. As well as giving some basic facts regarding the symptoms and causes of these, we will also offer guidance on some simple steps that you can take – such as adopting a balanced and healthy diet and making sure that you exercise regularly – to reduce the risk of suffering from these conditions.

In addition to lifestyle changes, if you have a condition which is controlled by medication – such as diabetes or hypertension – then it is vital that you take your medication as prescribed by your doctor. It is also important that you take sufficient supplies of your medication on board with you when you embark on your contract to last for the whole period that you are away, as additional supplies can sometimes be difficult to obtain at short notice in far flung countries. Don't think that because you feel well you don't need to continue to take the medication – making that mistake can have serious, even fatal, consequences!

We hope you find this summary issue of Health Watch both interesting and informative. Our aim is not to scare you, but to make you aware that relatively small changes in your lifestyle can have a significant positive impact on your health. Not only will this help you to work more efficiently and prolong your career at sea, but a renewed sense of wellbeing can benefit you and your family in every area of your life, whether on board or ashore. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or suggestions on other topics that you would like to see included in future editions of Health Watch.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a condition which affects many seafarers as it is often caused by not caring for your body properly through poor diet and lack of exercise.

It is a condition in which glucose gets trapped in the bloodstream and cannot get to the cells used for body energy. Insulin normally helps to transfer the glucose to these cells but if the pancreas – where insulin is produced – is not functioning as it should, then lower or no levels of insulin are produced.

There are two main types of diabetes and Type 2 is the most common.

The main symptoms include:



Extreme tiredness



An increased thirst



Urinating more, especially at night



Unexplained weight loss



Blurred vision

Waist size

Being overweight is the biggest risk for Type 2 diabetes and your waist size can be an indicator of this.



94

If your waist size is over 94cm for men (90cm for South Asian men) or 80cm for women, this puts you at high risk.

Your waist size shouldn't be more than half your height.

80

Prevention



Aim to control your weight with a *healthy, balanced diet*

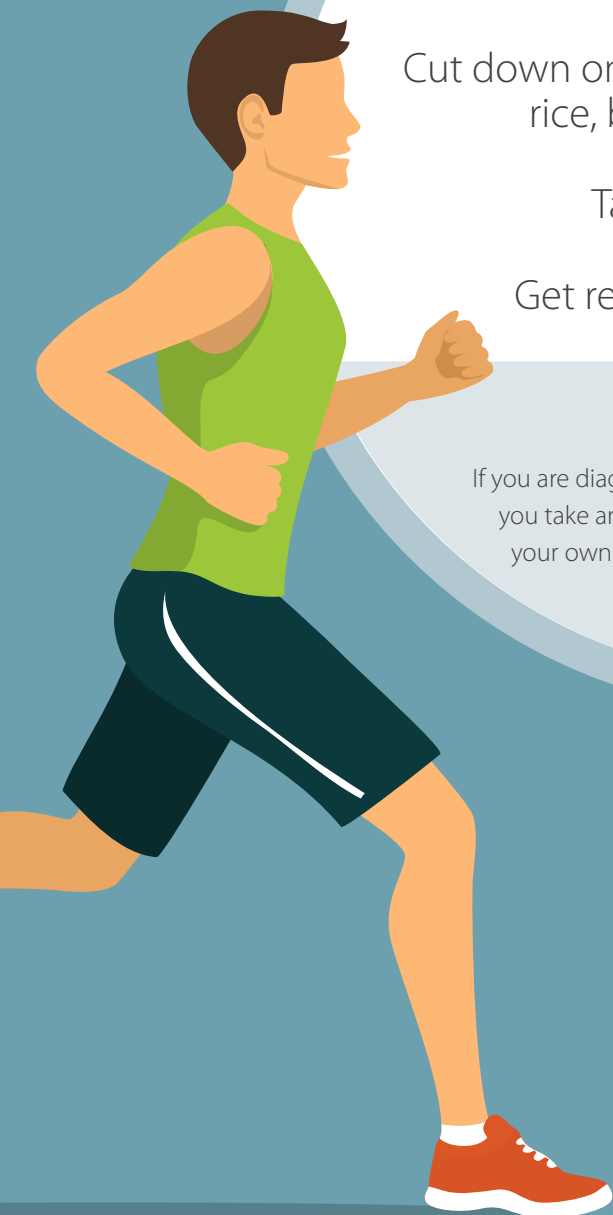
Cut down on *carbohydrates*, such as sugar, rice, bread, pasta and potatoes

Take *regular exercise*

Get regular *medical screening*

REMEMBER!

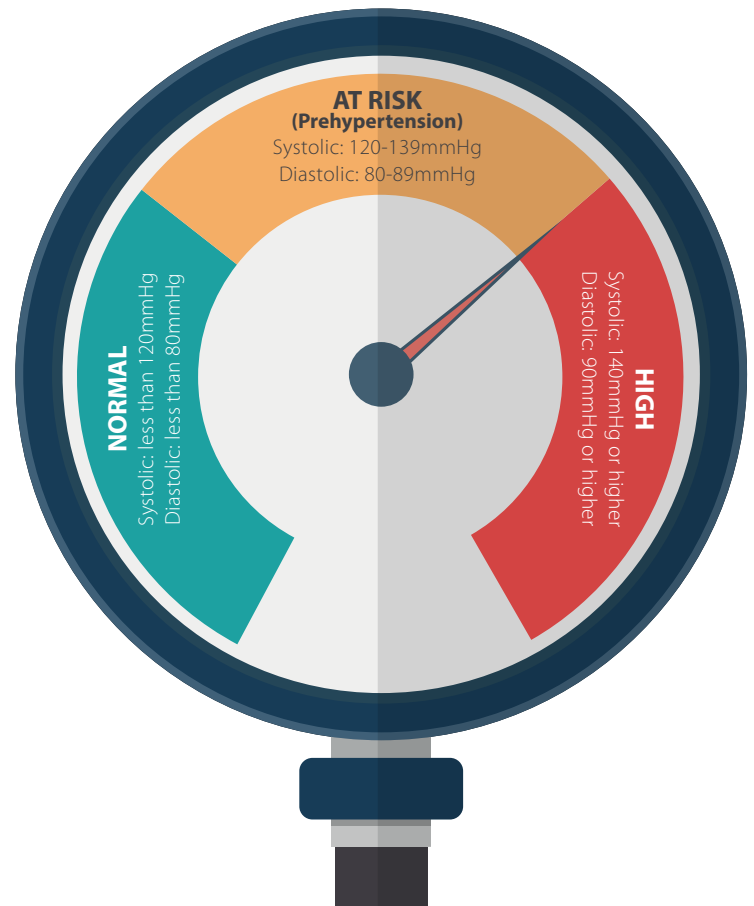
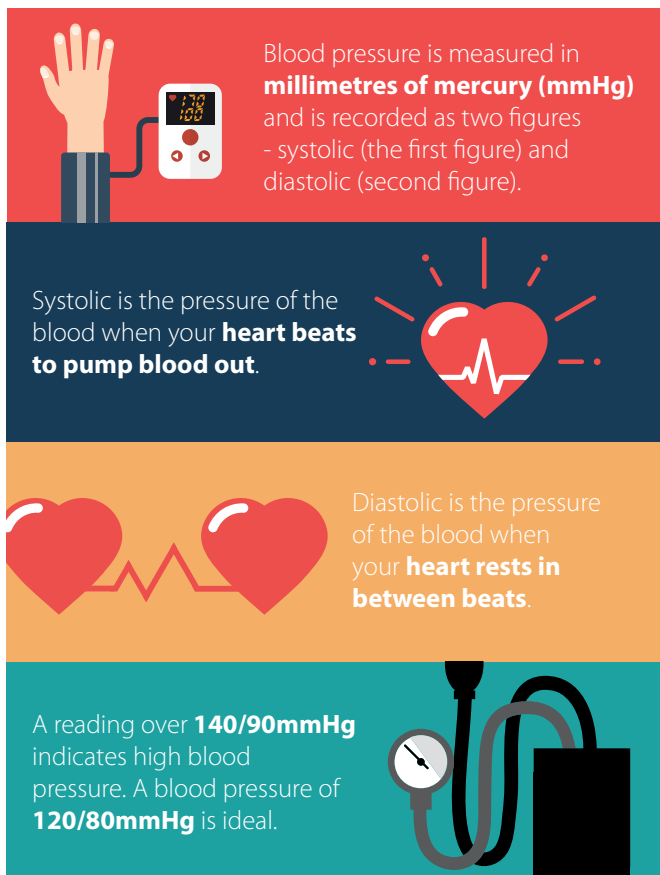
If you are diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes it is important that you take any medication that is prescribed and manage your own daily glucose monitoring, diet, exercise and work schedule.



Hypertension

Blood Pressure Levels

Hypertension (high blood pressure) often has no noticeable symptoms but if it goes untreated it can increase your risk of a heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease, stroke or dementia.



Prevention



Cut down on salt

Salt raises blood pressure – you should have no more than 6g (0.2oz) a day, which is a small teaspoonful



Cut down on alcohol

It is advised that men and women drink no more than 14 units a week (a can of average strength beer is 2 and a large glass of wine 3)



Take regular exercise

At least 150 minutes of moderate exercise such as fast walking each week



Watch your weight



Drink less caffeine

No more than 4 cups of coffee a day



Stop smoking



Take your medication!

If you are **diagnosed** with **hypertension**, medication can be taken to lower it. It is **important** that if you are given any medicines you remember to take them on board with you and **remember** to take them **every day**.

Kidney Stones

Kidney stones can develop in one or both kidneys and can cause severe pain.

Not taking in enough water is the main cause of kidney stones so it is vital that you drink/eat enough fluids. Your body naturally uses up water each day and also loses it through sweating and this needs to be replaced. Stones can also be caused by too much calcium in your diet, which can be found in foods such as beetroot, asparagus, soy products and some nuts.

How to tell if you are dehydrated



Dark yellow or brown urine



Few or no tears when crying



Reduced mental performance



Increased thirst



Muscle tiredness



General tiredness



Constipation



Headache



Stay hydrated

You should aim to take in **2.5 litres of water (men)** and **2 litres (women)** per day from **food and drink**. Around **70-80%** should come from drinks and the rest from food. Water is the best type of fluid to drink though tea, coffee and fruit juice can count towards your fluid intake. **Remember to drink more** when it is hot or when you are exercising or when you are working in a hot environment, such as the engine room.

Cancer

There are many causes of cancers but some lifestyle factors such as smoking, poor diet, lack of exercise, being overweight and exposure to certain chemicals and radiation are known to increase the risk.

Early detection is often key to successful treatment so don't ignore any unusual symptoms you may have.

If you have any of the following, seek medical guidance:





Five 'Golden Rules' could halve the risk of you getting cancer

Stop smoking:

Tobacco is the biggest avoidable risk factor

Cut down on alcohol:

No more than 14 units a week

Eat lots of fruit and vegetables:

At least five portions a day

Take regular exercise:

At least 150 minutes of moderate activity,
such as fast walking, each week



Maintain a healthy Body Mass Index (BMI)



<18.5	18.5 - 24.9	25 - 29.9	30 - 34.9	35 <
UNDERWEIGHT	NORMAL	OVERWEIGHT	OBESE	EXTREMELY OBESE

Your BMI is worked out by dividing your weight (kg) by your height (metres) and by then dividing this answer by your height again.

For example, if you weigh 90kg and you are 1.80m tall, divide 90 by 1.80. The answer is 50. Then divide this answer by 1.80 again – the answer is 27.7.

The healthy BMI range is 18.5 to 25.

Digestive Problems

Many digestive complaints and infections are caused by poor hygiene as germs can easily be spread in a number of ways.

Some, such as Salmonella and E.coli infections, can be spread through poor hygiene in storing and preparing food.

If you are working in the galley on board follow these tips:



Salmonella and E.coli can cause gastroenteritis but you can also get this by a virus, parasites or by coming into contact with people with an infection, so personal hygiene is also very important, particularly as many digestive infections cause sickness and diarrhoea.

If you have gastroenteritis, make sure you:

