



Your Pharmacy
...your neighbour

Health Really Matters™

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Many have it and don't know it and it can be deadly if not controlled.

Blood pressure is a measure of the pressure on the inside of our blood vessels as the blood circulates. High blood pressure (hypertension) is easily diagnosed with a blood pressure test. Two numbers make up a blood pressure reading. The top number indicates the systolic pressure that is the pressure the heart generates while pumping the blood to all parts of the body. The lower number is the diastolic pressure, a measure of the pressure in the arteries between beats or when the heart is temporarily at rest.

A normal blood pressure reading is usually 120/80 or lower. Your doctor diagnoses high blood pressure when the blood pressure is 140/90 or greater. The trouble with HBP is you can't feel it. So it quietly goes about doing its harm without your knowing it. Besides affecting your heart and kidneys, it can also affect your vision, sex life and is even implicated in being a contributor to dementia.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HBP) INFORMATION:

HBP affects many people. It is estimated that one in four Canadians suffer from it but the tragedy is that many of them don't know they have it. For this reason it is called "the silent killer". It is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. This is especially true as we grow older. Once diagnosed, it is necessary to make some changes in your life because even a small drop in blood pressure (e.g. 10/5) can reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke and death. For a healthy heart, lowering blood pressure is only one of six factors that are important. The others are to stop smoking, keep your cholesterol in check, reduce if overweight, increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and put more exercise back in your life.

HOW TO TAKE YOUR OWN BLOOD PRESSURE

- Buy a good quality blood pressure kit.
- Relax with no distractions for 5 minutes before testing. While taking your blood pressure, don't talk or watch TV.
- Ideally, it's good to wait for two hours after a large meal or 30 minutes after coffee or smoking. These activities can raise blood pressure.
- If you are uncomfortable due to a full bladder or need a bowel movement, take care of these first. Ideally wait for 30 minutes after using the bathroom.
- Sit in a chair that supports your back and place your arm so that it is at the same level as your heart. Keep your feet flat on the floor, legs uncrossed.
- It is important that the blood pressure cuff is the right size and correctly positioned at mid-point on the upper arm.
- Take two readings each day, one in the morning before breakfast and medications and one in the evening before bathing and medications. Record the date and time of each reading. Note whether you took the reading while you were sitting or standing.
- Keep a record of your readings. These can be helpful when you visit your doctor.

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MEDICATIONS FOR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Doctors will prescribe one or more medications when lifestyle measures fail to bring your pressure down to acceptable limits. When a drug is prescribed, it may take a few weeks for it to start working. There are some side effects to watch for but our Medicine Centre pharmacists will apprise you of the more important ones. It's very important to take your blood pressure medication regularly and not miss any doses. Because hypertension has no outward symptoms, some people may forget to take their medication. Establish a reminder system so you don't forget.

Types of medication for high blood pressure include:

- **DIURETICS** ("water pills" like furosemide and hydrochlorothiazide),
- **BETA-BLOCKERS** (bisoprolol, metoprolol). These slow your heart rate and reduce blood pressure to reduce the workload on your heart.
- **ANGIOTENSIN (ACEIs) converting enzyme inhibitors** (ramipril, enalapril) reduce blood pressure often in conjunction with diuretics.
- **ANGIOTENSIN RECEPTOR BLOCKERS (ARBs)** (irbesartan, valsartan). These drugs block an enzyme that cause blood vessels to constrict thus raising blood pressure.

Because high blood pressure is so prevalent in our society, researchers are always searching for the ideal drug to control it. Ironically, the answer lies in us. We have to take better care of ourselves, eat better, exercise more, reduce our stress and we may find our blood pressure lowers without medication.

But if you have to take medication, it is very important to have good compliance. Blood pressure-lowering medication works well but they have to be taken as the doctor ordered. If you miss many doses, the doctor may think the medication isn't working and increase the dose or change the medication. Our Medicine Centre pharmacists can show you some memory devices to help you take your medication correctly.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

One high blood pressure reading doesn't indicate hypertension. Doctors start to become concerned when readings are over 139/89 but may take more readings at two or three more appointments to confirm a hypertension diagnosis. Once confirmed, your doctor will discuss lifestyle changes that will help lower your blood pressure.

Examples include:

- **Exercise more.** Walking vigorously for 40 minutes four times weekly is a great way to reduce your blood pressure. If you aren't normally an exerciser, start slowly even once weekly and build up your frequency.
- **Keep your sodium intake down.** Sodium has an elevating effect on blood pressure. It's an important part of your diet and your body can't do without it but try to limit it to 2300 mg per day. Some physicians are suggesting an even lower limit of 1500 mg daily for hypertensives. Again, those nutritional labels on most food packages will list the amount of sodium in each serving to guide you.
- **If you need to... lose weight.** Even a loss of 10lb can lower your blood pressure by five points. Related to weight is your waist measurement. It's a great indicator of heart health. For men, keep your waist circumference below 40" (102cm) and for women, 35" (88cm).
- **Control your alcohol consumption.** No more than 14 drinks weekly for men and nine weekly for women. And certainly no binge drinking!
- **Increase your consumption of fruits and vegetables** and switch to food products low in saturated and trans fats. Eat more whole grains and fish.
- **Stress management** is important since stress is a contributing factor to blood pressure elevation.
- **Stop smoking.** Nicotine raises blood pressure and the carbon monoxide in the smoke reduces the concentration of oxygen circulating in the blood.
- **If medication is prescribed, take it as directed by your doctor.** They are usually taken for the long term. Since HBP is without symptoms, you may not feel better but it is doing its job in keeping your blood pressure in check.

What is white coat hypertension? Some people have normal blood pressure at home but it rises at the doctor's office. Monitoring your blood pressure at home and keeping good records will rule out this problem.

An ambulatory blood pressure monitor is a device your doctor may have you use to confirm a diagnosis of high blood pressure. It is a small device that you wear for 24 hours. The machine automatically measures your blood pressure every 15-30 minutes.

SUMMARY:

Prolonged high blood pressure can kill. By taking the proper steps toward a healthier lifestyle which includes diet and exercise, you can take control of this problem. Medication certainly does help if taken properly. Our Medicine Centre pharmacists are always available to answer your questions about blood pressure or any other health topic.