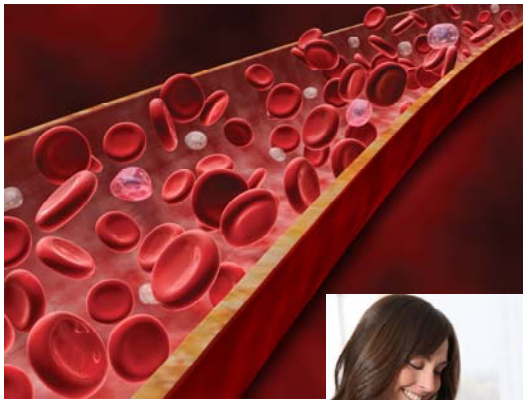


High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)



What is blood pressure?

Every time your heart beats, it pumps out blood into your arteries. As the blood goes all over your body in the arteries, it pushes against the arterial walls. This pushing force allows blood to deliver oxygen and nutrients throughout your body. This force is known as “blood pressure.”

How is blood pressure measured?

There are two measurements of blood pressure:

- **Systolic blood** pressure is your highest blood pressure measurement and occurs when your heart beats
- **Diastolic blood** pressure is your lowest pressure measurement and occurs when your heart relaxes

Please visit the UHN Patient Education website for more health information:

www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

© 2011 University Health Network. All rights reserved.

This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.





For example, a blood pressure of 120/80 mmHg means 120 is the **systolic blood pressure**, and 80 is the **diastolic blood pressure**.

In general, it is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly because there are no warning signs for high blood pressure. Your blood pressure may vary throughout the day and change from day to day. It is usually lowest when you are resting, and may change with your activity, posture and emotions. These temporary changes are normal if your blood pressure is within a healthy or normal range.

What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is also called “Hypertension.” This means that the pressure in your arteries is above your normal or healthy range. Your blood pressure will always stay high unless it is treated.

What is a normal blood pressure?

A blood pressure of 130/80 mmHg is normal, but, you will need to find out what a normal blood pressure is for you by talking with your doctor.

You should know that some activities increase your blood pressure. Jogging and stress will raise your blood pressure, while sleeping and meditation will lower your blood pressure.

How do you know if you have high blood pressure?

You cannot feel high blood pressure and you may not even know that you have high blood pressure. You may, however, have some of these signs and symptoms:

- headaches (lasting several days)
- dizziness
- blurry vision
- shortness of breath
- frequent, irregular heartbeats
- sweating
- anxiety

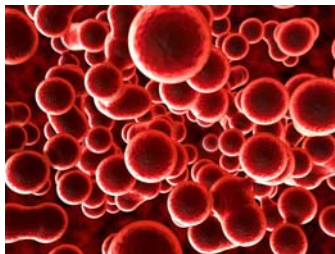


You should have your blood pressure checked at least once a year at your doctor's office. It is also a good time to have your cholesterol, kidney and blood sugar levels checked, too. It is important for you to know that one high reading of 140/90 mmHg does not mean that you have high blood pressure. Ask your doctor to measure it at least two other times, on separate days, to check whether it is always high.

Who is more likely to get high blood pressure?

Risk factors for high blood pressure that you have no control over are:

- A family history of heart disease or diabetes
- You are over 35 years of age
- Your ethnicity: if you are South Asian (i.e. Indian, Sri Lankan, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), East Asian (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai), Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit, or Metis heritage) or of Caribbean and African origin.
- You have had a pregnancy that was complicated
- You have high cholesterol
- You have kidney disease
- You are a woman taking birth control medication
- You have a medical condition such as Lupus or Pheochromocytoma (a tumour on the adrenal glands)



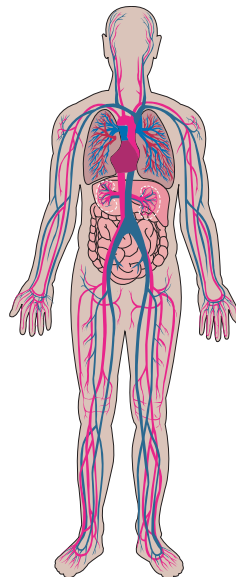
Risk factors for high blood pressure that you can do something about are:

- If you drink alcohol
- If you eat foods high in salt
- If you have high cholesterol
- If you have a high stress level
- If you are overweight
- If you have an inactive life style

What can happen if high blood pressure is not treated?

High blood pressure can damage the lining of your arteries anywhere in the body. If left untreated, it can lead to atherosclerosis [ath-uh-roh-skluh-roh-sis], or narrowing of the arteries. Atherosclerosis may lead to conditions such as:

- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Kidney failure
- Peripheral artery disease (PAD)
- Retinal or eye damage
- Impotence



Useful tips for living with high blood pressure: What you can do?

There are many healthy choices you can make to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level so that your important organs such as your brain, eyes, heart, and kidneys are not damaged.

Medications:

Take your blood pressure medication as prescribed by your doctor, even when you are feeling well. You will usually have to take your blood pressure medications for life.

- Take your blood pressure medications at the same time every day. Use reminders such as keeping your pills on the kitchen counter, or putting a sticker on your bathroom mirror.
- Keep an up-to-date record of all your medications with you at all times.
- When you travel, take along extra medications in case of delays.
- Mark your calendar with the date that your prescription runs out.
- Never increase, reduce, or stop taking your medication without talking to your doctor.
- Be aware that some over-the-counter medication, herbal or non-prescription medications can increase your blood pressure. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medications.
- Know your target blood pressure by checking it regularly at home or at the doctor's office.

Exercise:

- Exercise 30-60 minutes at least three to four times a week.
- Maintain a healthy body weight. If you are overweight, losing weight until you get to your ideal body weight can help reduce your blood pressure.



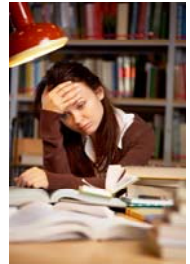
Foods you eat

- Reduce the amount of salt you eat by eating less foods with added salt (for example, eat less snack foods and smoked, salted, cured or canned meats and fish). Use less salt when cooking and at the table. The Canada Food Guide says that you should eat no more than 1 teaspoon (tsp) of salt every day (2300mg).
- Potassium - check with your healthcare professional to see if you should eat foods rich in potassium. Some potassium-rich foods are bananas, cantaloupes, grapefruits, oranges, tomato or prune juice, melons, prunes, molasses and potatoes.
- Use whole grains, lean meat, and fish



Stress

- Take time out for yourself!
- Find healthy ways to manage your stress. Too much stress may increase your blood pressure. Being able to cope with stress is just as important as reducing the amount of stress in your life.
- Avoid unhealthy ways to relieve stress (such as smoking, drinking alcohol, or eating fast foods high in salt and fat when you feel stressed).
- Find relief with exercise, socializing, laughter, and healthy eating instead.
- Make sure you DO NOT drink more than one or two standard alcohol drinks a day, for a maximum of 9 for women and 14 for men every week.
- Quit smoking and avoid second-hand smoke. Talk to your healthcare provider for solutions to quit smoking.



Here are some guidelines to help you improve your health:

- Be an educated consumer. Knowledge is Power!
- Be aware of what blood pressure reading is right for you.
- Remember, before you make any changes to your blood pressure medication, talk with your healthcare provider.