



Hypertension

You are in control

Hypertension, commonly known as high blood pressure, is a serious health concern for millions of Canadians. Those who experience chronic high blood pressure are at a greater risk of heart attack, stroke or kidney disease. The real danger is that many people affected by hypertension are not even aware of it because it has no symptoms or warning signs.

The exact cause of hypertension is unknown, though the following are known contributors:

- ✗ Too much salt
- ✗ Too much alcohol
- ✗ No regular physical activity
- ✗ Ongoing and excessive stress
- ✗ Smoking (smoking can cause a temporary rise in blood pressure)

Fortunately you are in control of these lifestyle factors and can take the necessary steps to avoid hypertension.

How is your blood pressure?

Because there are so few symptoms, the only way to find out if you have hypertension is to get your blood pressure checked by your doctor or by attending a regularly scheduled clinic at your local pharmacy.

A potentially life-saving squeeze!

Blood pressure is measured with an inflatable arm cuff and a pressure-measuring gauge. A blood pressure reading has two numbers. The first or upper number measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats (systolic pressure). The second or lower number measures the pressure in your arteries between beats (diastolic pressure). Blood pressure measurements below 115/75 are considered normal. Higher numbers indicate a greater risk of hypertension.

Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/high-blood-pressure/DS00100/DSECTION=6> (retrieved March 22, 2007)





The non-medicinal approach

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, lifestyle changes can prevent high blood pressure, and be as effective as prescription medication in lowering blood pressure levels. Of all these lifestyle changes, diet can have the biggest impact.¹



Dealing with hypertension

A single or occasional high blood pressure reading does not mean you have hypertension. However, a series of high readings may indicate chronic high blood pressure and your doctor can prescribe medication to manage your condition. As with any medication, you must follow the dosage instructions and you should ask your doctor about possible side effects. To learn more about hypertension, visit the websites on this page and be sure to talk to a health care professional before taking action on your own.

¹http://ww2.heartandstroke.ca/Page.asp?PageID=1711&AA_RecordID=3082&RecordID=3082&Stream=bp2 (retrieved March 22, 2007)

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

The Foundation's website provides a useful blood pressure action plan. You start by responding to a health assessment questionnaire to assess your current lifestyle. Then you create your own action plan based on your individual results. You can save and print the action plan to track your progress and sign up for the Foundation's personalized health updates.

INFO Visit <http://www.heartandstroke.ca/bloodpressure>

The Mayo Clinic Online

The Mayo Clinic is a US-based, not-for-profit health care organization known for providing reliable health information. The information they provide about hypertension is very thorough and covers:

- Signs and symptoms
- Causes
- Risk factors
- When to seek medical advice
- Screening and diagnosis
- Complications
- Treatment
- Self-care
- Coping skills

INFO Visit <http://www.mayoclinic.com> and select high blood pressure in the "Manage a Condition" box.

Not just another "fad" diet

The only dietary plan proven to reduce blood pressure is the "DASH" diet. DASH, or Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, evolved from a series of studies supported by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in the United States.

The DASH plan recommends increasing your intake of fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products and fish, and decreasing your intake of fat and salt.

The DASH booklet includes dieting instructions, detailed information about high blood pressure, sodium levels in common foods, and a week-long DASH Diet eating plan with recipes.

INFO Visit <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/> and type "dash guide PDF" in the search box. The booklet is the first link listed in the search results.