



High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

What is blood pressure?



The heart pumps blood around the body through blood vessels called arteries. *Blood pressure* is the force placed on the walls of the arteries by the moving blood.

Blood pressure is measured by placing a cuff around the upper arm, inflating it, and listening with a stethoscope placed over the artery below the cuff. The blood pressure measurement is written as 2 numbers; for example, 120/80. The upper number (systolic blood pressure) is the force on the artery walls when the heart pumps. The lower number (diastolic blood pressure) is the force on the artery walls when the heart rests briefly between beats.

What is high blood pressure?

You have high blood pressure if it is higher than 140/90 when checked 3 times at monthly visits. The medical name for high blood pressure is *hypertension*.

Sometimes other medical problems can cause your blood pressure to be high. Your doctor will examine you and may order tests to find out if you have such a problem. If you do, correcting the problem may also correct your high blood pressure. If not, then you have *essential hypertension* (high blood pressure).

No one knows what causes essential hypertension. The risk of having high blood pressure is greater if you have family members who have it, or if you are overweight, have diabetes, drink too much alcohol, eat too much salt, or do not exercise.

There are usually no symptoms of high blood pressure. That is why it is important to have annual checkups with your doctor. If high blood pressure is not treated, it can cause damage to the arteries that can lead to strokes, heart disease or kidney problems.

Treatment

Healthy Eating

Losing weight and cutting back on salt can help to control your blood pressure. Drinking too much coffee, tea, or cola can raise your blood pressure.

Following a low-fat diet is important - it will help you to have a healthy weight and cholesterol levels.



Exercise Regularly

Regular exercise can help to control your blood pressure and your weight. It can also help to relieve stress. For many people, the best exercise is walking. However, your doctor, nurse, or physiotherapist can help you choose the exercise that is best for you.



Drink Alcohol in Moderation

Limiting the amount of alcohol you drink will also help control your blood pressure. You should not drink more than two 12-ounce beers, two ounces of hard liquor, or two 4-ounce glasses of wine **per day**.

Medications

You may be given medication to treat your high blood pressure. A variety of medications are available, and it is often necessary to take more than one type. Sometimes medication does not work as well as it should or it causes you to have side effects. It is very important to call your doctor right away about any problems you may have with a medication. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can give you information about each medication that you are taking. You must take your medication **every** day, as ordered by your doctor. If you stop taking your medication, your blood pressure will rise again.

Stress

Stress is a natural part of everyone's life. However, stress can raise your blood pressure. Learning healthy coping skills will help you to manage stress and prevent health problems.

Stop Smoking

Smoking can cause problems with your heart and blood vessels. If you smoke and take medication for high blood pressure, your medication may not work as well as it should. It is very important to stop smoking. Ask your nurse or doctor for information to help you stop.



See Your Doctor Regularly

Keep your doctor appointments. Report any problems or concerns to your doctor or nurse **immediately**.

High blood pressure is a chronic disease.

There is no cure, but it can be controlled. You must do your part: by controlling your blood pressure, you can live a longer and healthier life!

Looking for more health information?

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazine articles and online health information.

For a list of public libraries in Nova Scotia go to [HTTP://publiclibraries.ns.ca](http://publiclibraries.ns.ca)

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Illustrations by: LifeART Health Care 1 Images, Copyright © 1994, TechPool Studios Corp. USA

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Designed and Printed by: QEII Audio Visual and Printing Departments