

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (sometimes called **hypertension**) affects 18% of Canadian women and 26% of Canadian men age 18-74¹. Yet up to half of those with high blood pressure aren't even aware they have a problem². You can have high blood pressure and still feel fine. That is because high blood pressure does not cause symptoms that you can see or feel. The good news is that there are ways you can prevent high blood pressure and control it if you already have it.

What Is Blood Pressure? The blood pressure reading tells your doctor the pressure or force of the blood flowing through your blood vessels as your heart beats.

Two numbers are read:

- **Systolic.** The first, or top, number (the highest) is your systolic blood pressure, which tells you how much the blood flowing through your blood vessels pushes against the vessel walls as your heart beats.
- **Diastolic.** The second (lower) number is your diastolic blood pressure. It shows the remaining pressure when the heart is resting between beats.

What Do The Numbers Tell Me? Normal readings are less than 120 for the systolic (top) pressure, and less than 80 for the diastolic (bottom). For example, your pressure may be 119 (top) over 79 (bottom). This is written as 119/79.

Slightly high numbers, such as 125/83, mean you have **prehypertension**, that you might develop high blood pressure. Your doctor will probably ask you to make changes to your daily habits or diet to lower the numbers.

A top number of 140 or higher, with a bottom number of 90 or higher at 2 or more check-ups means you have **high blood pressure**. The doctor will probably suggest medicine, changes in your diet, and exercise. If only one (1) number is high, you have **isolated systolic hypertension**. It is treated the same as high blood pressure.

1 Heart and Stroke Foundation (2002). High Blood Pressure. Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. Accessed September 9, 2008, from <http://ww2.heartandstroke.ca/Page.asp?PageID=1562&ArticleID=1362&Src=&From=SubCategory>.

2 Heart and Stroke Foundation (2002).

(Adapted with permission from the Practicing Physician Education Project 2006)

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What Causes High Blood Pressure? You may be at risk for high blood pressure if anyone else in your family has the condition. The risk increases if you have other health concerns, such as smoking, obesity, and diabetes. High blood pressure can be caused by other diseases as well.

It is important to have regular blood pressure checks. Even though your blood pressure may be high, you probably will not feel sick. You will only know it is high when it is checked.

High blood pressure is a major health concern. If not treated, it can lead to stroke, heart disease, eye problems, or kidney failure. Even slightly high blood pressure can cause kidney and heart problems over time, or dementia.

- How Can I Prevent or Control High Blood Pressure?** Try these healthy habits to help you control or prevent high blood pressure.
- **Keep a healthy weight.** Being overweight adds to your risk of high blood pressure. Losing as little as 5 pounds will help. Ask your doctor if you need to lose weight.
 - **Exercise.** Walking just 30 minutes every other day can help. But check with your doctor before starting.
 - **Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy foods.** A healthy diet is important. To control high blood pressure, eat a diet rich in these foods.
 - **Cut down on salt and sodium.** A low-salt diet might help lower your blood pressure. Talk with your doctor about your salt intake.
 - **Drink less alcohol.** Drinking alcohol can affect your blood pressure. Body size makes a difference. Generally, men should only have two (2) drinks a day; women only one (1).

What Else Can I Do? Your doctor may also have you take medicine to control your blood pressure, and you may need to take it for the rest of your life.

If this happens, remember that a healthy lifestyle may mean you need to take fewer medications, or smaller doses. Healthy eating and the right activity will improve your blood pressure and lessen your chances of other health problems.

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Resources **Organization**

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario

Web site: www.heartandstroke.on.ca

Belleville Office: Supporting Prince Edward, Hastings, Marmora, Quinte East, Trenton, Tweed, Madoc, Bancroft & Marmora Lake

121 Dundas Street East, Suite 106A

Belleville, Ontario K8N 1C3

Telephone (613) 962-2502

Fax (613) 962-6080

Brockville Office: Supporting Perth & Lanark Area, Gananoque, Leeds West, Kemptville-Grenville North, Smiths Falls

51 King Street East, Suite 310

Brockville, Ontario K6V 1A8

Telephone (613) 345-6183

Fax (613) 345-3037

Cornwall Office: Supporting Stormont, Prescott-Russell, Dundas & Glengarry

36 Second Street East

Cornwall, Ontario K6H 1Y3

Telephone (613) 938-8933

Fax (613) 938-0655

Kingston Office: Supporting Frontenac, Lennox-Addington

720 Progress Avenue

Kingston, Ontario K7M 4W9

Telephone (613) 384-2871

Fax (613) 384-2899

Other **Web Sites**

Resources **Canadian Cardiovascular Society**

Web site: www.ccs.ca

Health Check

Web site: www.healthcheck.org/

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Other Resources **Smart Choices, Made Simple. The Health Check™** program has been designed by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada to help you with your grocery shopping for wise food choices. To learn more about the Health Check™ program, visit the site.
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Heart and Stroke Research

Web site: www.hsf.ca/research

This site is intended primarily for individuals with an interest in the research programs of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. A more comprehensive site with information relevant for other groups, in particular the general public, is available at www.heartandstroke.ca. Please take time to visit this site.

Medbroadcast

Web site: www.medbroadcast.com

Medbroadcast is a partner of the Heart and Stroke Foundation and one of Canada's leading providers of patient-focused health and wellness information on the web.

Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion

Web site: www.mhp.gov.on.ca

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario works in partnership with the Ministry of Health Promotion (MHP) to encourage Ontarians to lead healthier lives. With tobacco being the No. 1 preventable cause of heart disease and stroke, the Ministry's Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy, one of the most comprehensive in North America, is a key focus of this work. Another key partnership with the Ministry is the Ontario Stroke System, which aims to provide people with the best possible stroke care across the continuum of care, including prevention, emergency and acute, rehabilitation, community and research.

The Canadian Stroke Strategy

Web site: www.canadianstrokestrategy.ca

The Canadian Stroke Strategy is a joint initiative of the Canadian Stroke Network and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. The goal of the Canadian Stroke Strategy is to help support an integrated approach to stroke prevention, treatment and rehabilitation in every province and territory by 2010.

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