

# HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND HEART DISEASE

## HOW TO CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE **AND** REDUCE YOUR RISK OF HEART DISEASE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Check where applicable*

- Control your weight.**
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink a day to:**
  - 2 drinks a day or less \_\_\_\_\_
  - none \_\_\_\_\_
- Cut back on salt:**
  - Limit your use of salt in cooking.
  - Limit your use of salt at the table.
  - Avoid salty foods.
  - Choose fresh or frozen food; avoid canned or precooked.
  - Read labels on food.
  - Use other seasonings such as herbs, spices, lemon juice, garlic.
- Eat foods rich in potassium** such as bananas, oranges, melons, kiwis, potatoes, tomatoes, milk, nuts, and whole grain cereals.
- Don't smoke.**
- Plan to be active 30 minutes or more every day, or at least 3 times per week.**
- Take time to relax.**
- Take your medication as prescribed.**
- Check your blood pressure at home.**

# SOME IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND HEART DISEASE

*High blood pressure is dangerous when it is not treated. People with high blood pressure are more likely to have a heart attack or a stroke.*

*High blood pressure is a silent disease. Most people with high blood pressure don't have any symptoms, so they don't know if they have it unless their blood pressure is checked.*

*One out of four people with high blood pressure is unaware of their condition.*

**THE GOOD NEWS IS: YOU CAN REDUCE YOUR RISK OF HEART DISEASE.**

**Work with your doctor:**

**To control your blood pressure.**

**To control the other factors that can lead to heart disease.**

# CONTROLLING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

## WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure is the force that pushes your blood to all parts of your body.

Blood pressure is shown by two numbers. For example, your nurse or doctor may say your blood pressure is “125 over 80.” The higher number (125) is the pressure when the heart beats. It is called the systolic pressure. The lower number (80) is the pressure when the heart relaxes between beats. It is called the diastolic pressure.

### **Normal blood pressure**

Blood pressure is normal when the higher number is below 130 and the lower number is below 85. For example, 125 over 80 (125/80) is normal blood pressure.

### **High normal blood pressure**

Blood pressure between 130/85 and 139/89 is high normal and should be rechecked every year.

### **High blood pressure**

Blood pressure of 140/90 or over is high.

**There is only one way to find out if you have high blood pressure – have your blood pressure checked by your doctor or nurse.** One high blood pressure reading does not always mean you have high blood pressure. It takes several readings to know for sure. If your blood pressure becomes high and stays high, your doctor will say you have “high blood pressure.” The medical word for high blood pressure is hypertension.

## CONTROLLING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

In most cases, we don't know the cause of high blood pressure. As we age, we are more likely to have high blood pressure, especially if others in our family have this problem. However, how we live can also lead to high blood pressure. Eating too much salt, drinking too much alcohol and being overweight can all lead to blood pressure problems. Some medications, such as birth control pills, have also been linked to high blood pressure.

Some people only need to change their eating and drinking habits or become more physically active to bring their blood pressure back to normal. Others also need medication. Whatever is causing your high blood pressure, remember that you can control it by working with your doctor and by making some changes in how you live.

# NINE WAYS TO CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

If you have **any** questions about this information, ask your doctor.

## 1. CONTROL YOUR WEIGHT

Losing even a small amount of weight can lower your blood pressure, even before you reach a healthy weight.

### Here are some tips for losing weight:

- Be active. Physical activity helps you control your weight. Read Section 6.
- Eat a variety of nutritious foods from each of the four food groups (grain products, vegetables and fruit, milk products, meat and alternatives).
- Cut down on fat. Choose leaner meats, poultry, and fish. Choose low-fat dairy products such as 1% or skim milk, cheese with 15% milk fat (15 % M.F.) or less on the label, or low-fat yogurt.
- Eat more foods that are sources of fibre such as fruits, vegetables, dried beans and lentils, and whole grains - brown rice, whole wheat bread, whole grain cereals.
- Avoid foods that are rich in sugar, such as candy and cookies.

## 2. CUT BACK ON ALCOHOL

Drinking alcohol can increase your blood pressure.

- Have no more than two drinks a day. (One drink equals one bottle of beer, one glass of wine [5 ounces of wine] or one glass of liquor [1 1/2 ounces of liquor]).
- Avoid alcohol completely, if your doctor recommends it.
- Cutting back, or cutting out, all alcohol can lower your blood pressure. For some people who take blood pressure medication, cutting back on alcohol makes the medication work better.
- Alcohol contains a lot of calories, so drinking can add to a weight problem.



### 3. CUT BACK ON SALT

For some people, too much sodium leads to high blood pressure. Sodium is found in salt and in many prepared foods.

#### **Here are some tips for cutting back on salt:**

- Limit your use of salt in cooking and at the table.
- Avoid salty foods such as:
  - canned or dehydrated soups
  - canned fish, meat and vegetables
  - processed meat and cheeses
  - salted crackers and chips
  - seasoning salts, marinades, ketchup, mustard, and soy sauce
  - frozen dinners and precooked, packaged foods
- Choose foods that are unsalted or lower in salt or sodium such as fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, cereals, plain rice, pasta, bread and milk.
- Read labels when you are shopping for food: Look for labels that say “low sodium” or “no added salt.” Warning: A label claiming “reduced sodium” such as “50% less salt” means that the food is lower in salt. This may be good, but the food can still have a lot of salt.  
Choose foods with 300 mg or less of salt per serving.  
Avoid food containing three or more sources of sodium. Baking soda, baking powder, and M.S.G. (monosodium glutamate) are three sources of sodium often found in foods.
- Instead of salt, use fine herbs, spices, dry mustard, vinegar, lemon juice or other fruit juice, ginger, garlic, or onion.

### 4. EAT FOODS RICH IN POTASSIUM

Besides cutting back on salt, it is also a good idea to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and other sources of potassium:

- most fruits and vegetables, particularly bananas, oranges, melons, kiwis, potatoes and tomatoes
- milk
- nuts
- whole grain cereals, especially those that contain oats



### 5. DON'T SMOKE

If you have high blood pressure and you also smoke, you have a *much* higher risk of having a heart attack or a stroke. Stop smoking, and reduce your risk! Stopping smoking will also help you get better results from high blood pressure treatment.

#### **Some of the ways to quit smoking:**

- Quit on your own; it works for many people.
- Join a smoking cessation program. Check with your doctor or local health unit.
- Medication for smoking cessation (gum, patch or pill) is helpful for some people. Discuss this with your doctor.

## 6. BE ACTIVE

Regular physical activity is very good for your health. Even small amounts of activity are helpful.

Being active helps lower your blood pressure.

Being active helps you control your weight.

Being active helps you control your stress.

It is one of the best natural tranquilizers.

- Before you start an activity program, talk with your doctor about which activities are best for you.
- Plan to be active 30 minutes or more every day, or at least 3 times per week. Activities should be moderate in intensity. These activities make you breathe faster than normal, like when you're walking quickly or dancing.

**But don't overdo it. Make sure that you can still talk easily.**

- You don't have to do 30 minutes of activity all at once. You can work up to this by doing small amounts several times a day. Try to do at least 10 minutes of activity each time.
- Choose activities that you enjoy and that are right for you. The best ones are those that use the large muscles, especially those in the legs. When these muscles are working, they require more oxygen, so the heart has to beat faster. This way your heart becomes a stronger, more efficient pump.

**Here is a sample of types of activities that are best:** fast walking, biking, swimming, cross-country skiing, and dancing.

These activities are great, but they are not the only way to be active. Enjoy physical activities as part of your daily routine.

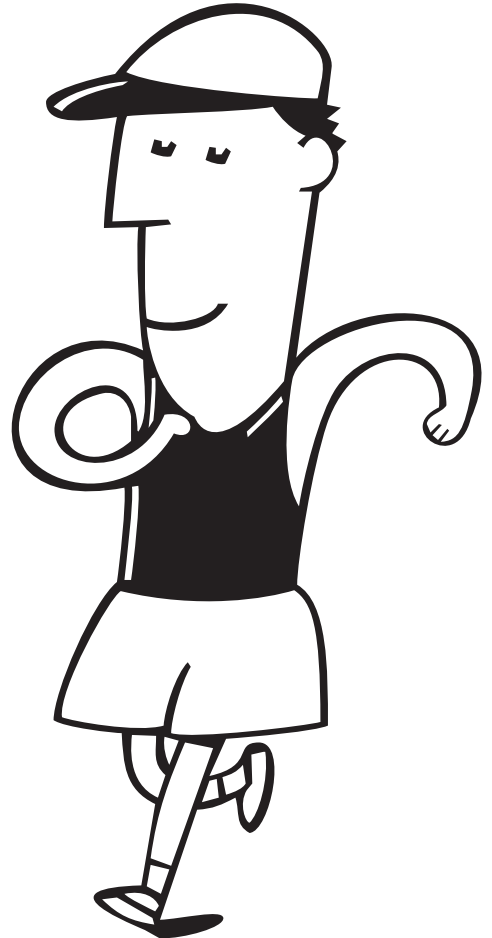
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park your car or get off the bus a few blocks early, and walk the rest of the way.
- Walk around the block on your breaks at work.

## 7. TAKE TIME TO RELAX

Controlling your stress might also help control your blood pressure. Different things bother people in different ways. So pay attention to what gives you stress, and how it affects you.

**Here are some tips to help you relax:**

- Learn to cope with your stress. Good ways to cope are to manage your time better, to talk about your needs and feelings, and to keep physically active.
- When you feel tense, do something different. For example, move to a different room, turn on the radio, or go for a walk.
- Get enough rest and sleep.
- Try new techniques to relax, such as yoga or meditation, and practise them regularly.
- If stress is a problem for you, ask your doctor for tips that might work for you.



## 8. IF YOU ARE TAKING MEDICATION, TAKE IT AS YOUR DOCTOR PRESCRIBED IT

- If your doctor gives you high blood pressure medication, take it just as it is prescribed. *Never* change or skip your medication, and *never* stop it without talking to your doctor.
- If you are having any side effects from your medication, talk with your doctor. You may need to switch to a different kind.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist before buying over-the-counter drugs. Some of them, such as decongestants, can increase your blood pressure.
- Keep an up-to-date list handy of all your medications.

If you find it hard to remember to take your medication regularly, **here are some tips:**

- Buy a pill organizer at your drugstore. It is a small box with places to keep your medication for each day of the week. Fill it up at the beginning of every week.
- Put your medication in a place that connects it to your daily routine, such as near your toothbrush or on the breakfast table. Keep your medication away from children at all times.

- Make a note on your calendar to get a refill of your prescription *before* it runs out.
- Take enough medication with you when you travel.
- Get support from your family. They can help to remind you to take your medication.

Even if you need medication for your high blood pressure, how you live is still very important.

**Medication is not enough on its own. It does not replace a healthy diet and regular physical activity.**

Work with your doctor. Make regular appointments, and if you miss one, call and make another one as soon as possible.

## 9. IF NECESSARY, LEARN TO CHECK YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE YOURSELF

Some people may benefit from checking their blood pressure at home. If your doctor recommends this, be sure you know what equipment to use and how to use it. Use the blood pressure record in this pamphlet to keep track of your blood pressure.

# CONTROLLING THE OTHER FACTORS THAT CAN LEAD TO HEART DISEASE

In addition to high blood pressure, other factors can lead to heart disease and stroke. These are: smoking, high blood cholesterol, physical inactivity, diabetes, and overweight.

**You can make a difference. The more risk factors you control, the lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. If you want to lower your risk of heart disease:**

- Don't smoke.
- Ask your doctor if you need your blood cholesterol checked.
- Ask your doctor if you need your blood glucose checked.
- Be active.
- Control your weight.

*Your doctor may suggest other pamphlets on each of these topics. Ask for the ones that interest you.*

