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Understanding and measuring your blood pressure



PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY
HYPERTENSION CANADA



What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pumped from the heart against the blood vessels. This force makes blood flow possible, delivering nutrients and oxygen to organs and tissues throughout the body.

High blood pressure occurs when there is too much pressure in your blood vessels. This can damage your blood vessels and cause health problems. Anyone can develop high blood pressure, but it becomes more common as you get older.

High blood pressure is similar to pumping too much air into a tire or balloon.

What are my blood pressure numbers and what do they mean?

The first step in understanding high blood pressure is learning what your numbers mean. Blood pressure is measured with two numbers: systolic (the top number) and diastolic (the bottom number) (e.g., 120/80 mmHg).

The higher your top and bottom number are – and the longer they stay high – the greater the potential damage to your blood vessels.

Why should I care about high blood pressure?

If your blood pressure is not well controlled, it can pose serious health risks. High blood pressure increases your risk of:

- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Eye problems
- Dementia
- Kidney (renal) diseases
- Heart failure
- Erectile dysfunction

High blood pressure is common, but most people don't even know they have it! (see <https://hypertension.ca/im-concerned-i-may-have-high-blood-pressure-what-do-i-need-to-know>)

How can I maintain a healthy blood pressure?



Eat a healthy diet: Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, low-fat milk products, whole grains, lean meats, fish, legumes (dried beans) and nuts.



Limit salt intake: A general rule of thumb: buy products that are labelled with $\leq 5\%$ daily value of sodium.



Maintain a healthy lifestyle: Try to achieve a healthy weight, be active.



Manage your stress levels: Find effective ways to cope with stress, don't hesitate to get some help.



Limit your alcohol consumption: 2 drinks per day or less is best.



Refrain from smoking: It's hard to quit smoking, seek help if needed.



Take your blood pressure medication(s) if prescribed: Pills are a way to help your body fight high blood pressure.

What can I do to control my blood pressure?

Do I have high blood pressure?

If your numbers are above 130/80 mmHg at home, you have high blood pressure.

Should I measure my blood pressure at home?

It's always helpful to know what your numbers are at home. Sometimes, blood pressures at home are different than the ones measured in clinic.

I'm going to my clinic today, can I help?

Make sure they measure your blood pressure correctly. Ask questions about your numbers and where they should be.

Do I need to take pills?

Healthy habits are sometimes not enough to get your numbers low enough, and your body may need help from pills. Lots of people need more than one kind of pill.

How low should my blood pressure be?

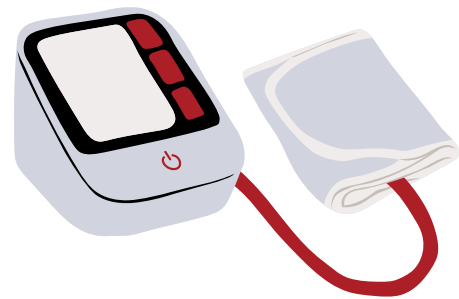
Most people should have their top number below 130 mmHg but ask your doctor or nurse if this is different for you.

Should I start treatment?

Yes, if you have high blood pressure, but it may only mean lifestyle changes and not necessarily starting pills right away.

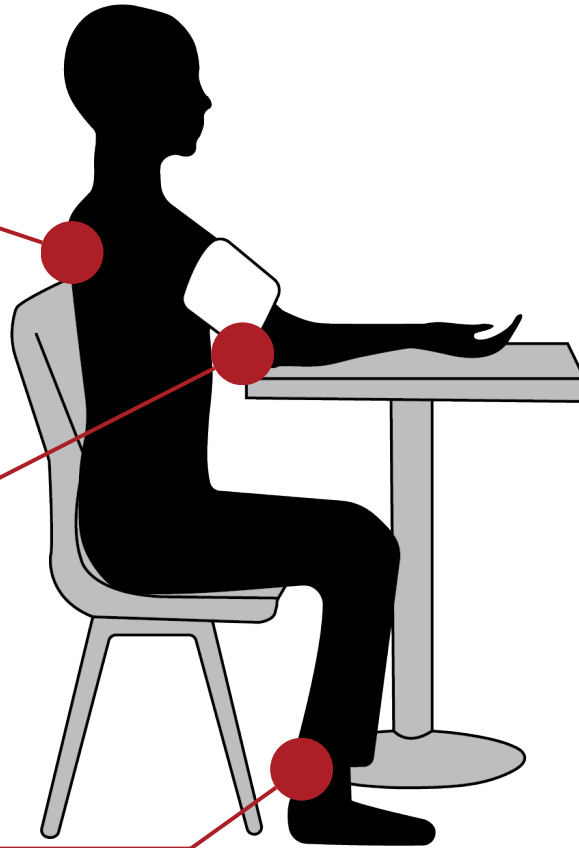
Should I be concerned?

The higher your numbers are, the greater the risk and the more concerned you should be.



Optimal Blood pressure measuring technique:

- ✓ Sitting position
- ✓ Back supported
- ✓ Arm bare and supported
- ✓ Use a cuff size appropriate for your arm
- ✓ Middle of the cuff at heart level
- ✓ Lower edge of the cuff 3 cm above elbow crease
- ✓ Do not talk or move before or during the measurement
- ✓ Legs uncrossed
- ✓ Feet flat on the floor



Good preparation:

- Quiet and calm room with a 5-minute rest.
- No caffeine, tobacco or exercise in the 30 min before the measurements.

Good equipment:

- Use a validated home blood pressure device
- (see the [Hypertension Canada website](#) or ask a pharmacist)



Good protocol:

- Measure your blood pressure regularly and in a consistent manner.
- Ideally, in the week before your appointment to the clinic, measure it two times twice per day for several days.

Mission:

Advancing the health of Canadians by enabling the detection, prevention and control of high blood pressure and its complications

Vision:

Healthy blood pressure for every Canadian.

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Hypertension Canada does not provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.
