

Blood Pressure

What is blood pressure?

Your blood travels through your body in blood vessels. Blood vessels are like tubes, and come in different sizes. As your blood travels along, it pushes on the walls of the tubes. This is called blood pressure.

Your blood pressure has 2 parts: **systolic** and **diastolic**.



What does systolic mean?

When your heart pumps, it pushes blood forward. This increases the pressure on the walls of the blood vessels. This pressure is called **systolic**.

What does diastolic mean?

Between pumps, the heart is resting and refilling with blood. This decreases the pressure on the blood vessel walls. This is called **diastolic**.

What do the numbers mean?

Blood pressure is written as 2 numbers. There is a number on the top and a number on the bottom.

120 **systolic** = when your heart contracts and pumps blood forward

80 **diastolic** = when your heart relaxes

In this example the blood pressure is 120 over 80.

You will see members of the health care team write blood pressure like this: **120/80**



What numbers should my blood pressure be?

A good blood pressure for a healthy adult is:

systolic: 90 to 120

diastolic: 60 to 80

Your blood pressure may vary from average, but may be normal for you.

If you have diabetes, peripheral artery disease or kidney disease, the goal is to keep your blood pressure below 130/80.

What if my blood pressure is too high?

High blood pressure is called hypertension. If you have high blood pressure, most people have it for the rest of their lives. People with high blood pressure need to learn how to control it to avoid health problems.

What does high blood pressure feel like?

Most people do not feel high blood pressure. This is why it is important to control it. High blood pressure that is not well controlled can lead to problems with the brain, kidneys and heart.



High blood pressure over a long time causes blood vessels in the body to get thick, narrow and hard. The blood vessels in the heart, brain, and kidneys also get narrow and hard. This makes the heart beat faster and pump harder. This can cause a heart attack, stroke or kidney failure.

How can I control my blood pressure?

Members of the health care team can help you learn what to do. Since each person is different, follow the guidelines you and your health care provider have discussed.

Medication, activity and diet can help control your blood pressure. If you need medications, it is important to take them exactly as directed.

Here are some ways to help you control your blood pressure:

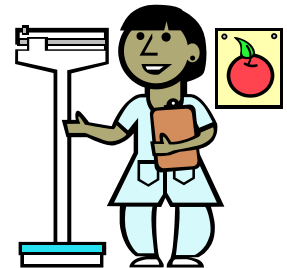
Blood pressure checks:

- Check your blood pressure regularly. You can have your blood pressure checked by your health care provider or use a home monitoring machine.
- When buying a new home monitoring machine, it is a good idea to take it with you to your next doctor's or health care provider's appointment to have it checked.



Diet:

- Avoid salty food and foods high in cholesterol. Follow Canada's Food Guide to help you make healthy food choices and reduce your risk of heart disease. You can get a copy of the Food Guide by:
 - ◆ email: publications@hc-sc-gc.ca
 - ◆ call Toll Free: 1-800-267-1245
- Choose lower fat dairy products. Drink 1% or skim milk. Choose low fat cheese with Milk Fat (MF) under 19%. Choose 1% or 2% cottage cheese, yogurt or sour cream.
- Choose lean cuts of meat and eat fish often.
- Prepare food without extra fat like butter or oil. Use healthy oils such as canola or olive oil.
- Control your portions.
- Achieve and maintain healthy body weight.
- Limit your alcohol intake to 1 to 2 drinks a day.
- Limit the amount of caffeine you have.



Activity and exercise:

- Get regular physical activity. Aim for 30 minutes, 5 times of exercise a week. Walking is a great way to get started. Talk to your health care provider for advice on how to get started or exercises you should avoid due to health problems.



Quit smoking:

- Nicotine increases your heart rate.
- Quitting lowers your risk of heart disease.



Manage Stress:

- Take time to relax. Become aware of stress at work, home and in relationships. Try to relax using yoga, meditation, listening to music, reading or any activity you enjoy.



Blood pressure medication:

- There are many kinds of blood pressure control medication. It may take a while to find the medication or combination of medications that works best for you.
- Take your medication as directed even when your blood pressure returns to normal.
- Do not stop taking your medication without talking to your health care provider.



Have regular check-ups

- See your health care provider regularly for check-ups.

