

# Health Education Fact Sheet

*From Nurses for You*

*Nursing Best  
Practice Guideline*

## Reducing the Risk of Hypertension

**Did you know that about one-quarter of Canadians have hypertension?** (Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario)

### *What is hypertension?*

Hypertension is a complex health condition that occurs when your blood pressure is higher than normal. This condition is known as a ‘silent killer’ because people often do not notice that they have symptoms. As you get older, it is more likely you will develop hypertension.

If you have hypertension, you are at a higher risk of having a stroke, a heart attack or damaging your blood vessels and/or organs (e.g., heart, brain, kidney).

### *What affects your blood pressure?*

A number of combined factors can increase your blood pressure. These include:

- eating an unhealthy diet
- eating foods with too much salt
- being overweight
- not getting enough exercise
- drinking too much alcohol
- smoking
- heredity
- unmanaged stress

### *How do I know if I have high blood pressure?*

When you visit your healthcare centre, your nurse or other healthcare provider will measure your blood pressure by using a blood pressure cuff or monitor. The reading is made up of 2 numbers. The top number represents the force of blood against the walls of your blood vessels when the heart contracts. The bottom number represents the force of the blood against the walls of your blood vessels when the heart relaxes.

For most people, high blood pressure is anything over 140/90mmHg. But for those with diabetes or chronic kidney disease, 130/80mmHg is considered high blood pressure. For those people with “high normal” blood pressure (130 to 139/85 to 89mmHg), it is important to have your blood pressure checked annually. Speak to your nurse to find out what your blood pressure target should be and how often you should have your blood pressure checked.

***Can hypertension be treated?***

Hypertension can be prevented and/or controlled if you make certain lifestyle changes. These changes include:

***Eat a healthy diet*** – Ask your nurse or dietitian how you can make healthier food choices. This means eating more fresh fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, nuts and legumes, soluble fibre (ie., kidney beans, lentils and oats) and non-animal protein (ie., soy).

***Eat less salt*** – Eating less salt can reduce your blood pressure. Choose foods that are low in salt, avoid adding extra salt to your food while cooking or at the dinner table and eat fewer packaged foods. You should eat less than 1 teaspoon (2300mg) of salt per day from all sources.

***Exercise*** – Exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight and should be done at least 4 days a week for 30 to 60 minutes or more each session. Activities for older adults can include walking, gardening, golfing, Tai Chi and light weight training.

***Stop smoking*** – Smoking makes your blood vessels more narrow which raises your blood pressure and can lead to heart disease, cardiovascular disease and stroke.

***Limit alcohol*** – Alcohol should be limited to 2 standard size drinks for men and 1 standard size drink for women per day. Men should have no more than 14 drinks and women no more than 9 drinks per week. 1 standard drink = 1 beer (12 oz.) or 1 glass of wine (5 oz.) or 1.5 oz. of spirits. Source: [www.lrdg.net](http://www.lrdg.net).

***Manage stress*** – Your nurse can help you understand how you react to stressful events and can give you advice on how to manage stress in your life. Learning how to deal with stress and finding ways to relax will improve your overall good health. Good coping ideas are: exercising, getting enough rest, laughing and asking for help from others if you need it.

***Medications*** – Many people with hypertension will have to take 2 or more prescription drugs along with making lifestyle changes to control their blood pressure. It is important to keep taking your blood pressure medications regularly in order for them to work. If you have questions, speak to your nurse or other healthcare provider.

***Monitor your blood pressure*** – Your nurse can teach you how to check your blood pressure levels at home. You should also have your blood pressure checked regularly by your healthcare professional. For more information on hypertension and blood pressure monitors, visit [www.hypertension.ca](http://www.hypertension.ca).

**If you have high blood pressure or are concerned that you may have high blood pressure, please speak to your nurse or other healthcare provider. They can help you make lifestyle changes that can prevent or help treat your hypertension.**

The intent of this fact sheet is to get you involved in decisions affecting your health. You can find this fact sheet on our website for free download. To find out more about our fact sheets and guidelines, please visit our website at [www.rnao.org/bestpractices](http://www.rnao.org/bestpractices).



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