



Managing your blood pressure

Take action to reduce your risk



What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps. It's a measure of how well your heart and blood vessels are working. This pressure keeps blood moving through your body, delivering oxygen and nutrients to your organs and tissues.

Blood pressure numbers

A blood pressure reading has two numbers:

- **Systolic pressure (top number)** is the measure of the pressure when your heart contracts and pushes blood through the arteries.
- **Diastolic pressure (bottom number)** is the measure of the pressure when your heart relaxes between beats.



How is blood pressure measured?

A blood pressure measurement is taken using a blood pressure machine with a cuff that wraps snugly around your upper arm. The cuff fills with air and then slowly deflates while the machine takes your reading.

You can have your blood pressure checked:

- by a healthcare provider
- using a public machine, such as at your local pharmacy
- at home using a portable blood pressure monitor.

Healthcare provider

Refers to a doctor, nurse practitioner or other qualified health professional.

What is high blood pressure?

It's normal for blood pressure to go up and down during the day, especially during physical activity or stress. But if it stays higher than normal over time, it can lead to a condition called hypertension — also known as high blood pressure.



High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart disease.

Current Hypertension Canada guidance (2025)

High blood pressure is a reading at or above **130/80 mmHg** — even if only one of the numbers is high (for example, **135/75** or **125/87**).

A single high reading doesn't mean you have hypertension. Diagnosis requires multiple readings, taken correctly at home over several days or during clinic visits, that show your blood pressure stays elevated.

Anyone can get high blood pressure. Keeping an eye on it — whether at a clinic, pharmacy or at home — can help you catch high blood pressure early and take steps to manage it. If you're diagnosed with high blood pressure, your healthcare provider will recommend a blood pressure target and a management plan based on your medical history and risk factors.

Did you know?

Many people have higher-than-normal blood pressure readings just by being in the doctor's office. This is called the "white coat effect." Comparing readings taken during healthcare visits with those from home or a pharmacy can help you and your healthcare provider see whether this applies to you.

Why high blood pressure matters

High blood pressure puts too much pressure on the walls of your arteries. Over time, this can damage your arteries and reduce blood flow throughout your body. It can lead to:

- stroke
- heart attack
- heart failure
- kidney disease or kidney failure
- dementia.

The higher your blood pressure — and the longer it stays high — the more damage it can cause.

How to know if you have high blood pressure

Often, you can't feel high blood pressure, which is why it's called a "silent killer." The only way to know is to measure it.

Often, you can't feel high blood pressure. There are no warning signs.



What you can do to support healthy blood pressure

Certain factors can increase your chances of developing high blood pressure. Some — like your age, race, ethnicity or indigeneity, and family history — can't be changed. But others, such as your eating habits, activity level and other lifestyle habits are within your control. Healthy lifestyle habits can help prevent high blood pressure and lower it if you already have it.

Blood pressure tends to increase with age.



Monitor your blood pressure

- **If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure:** Your healthcare provider will advise how often it needs to be reassessed to monitor your progress and treatment effectiveness.
- **If you have not been diagnosed with high blood pressure:** Check it occasionally at home or at a pharmacy. You can also get it checked during a regular visit to your healthcare provider — even if you're there for something else.

Eat less salt

- Aim for less than 2,300mg of sodium per day (about 1 tsp / 5 mL of salt).

Shake the habit

Most of the salt we eat (80%) comes from ready-made and processed foods — think fast food, frozen or prepared meals, processed meats, canned soups, bottled dressings, packaged sauces, condiments (like ketchup and pickles) and salty snacks, such as potato chips.



Tips for eating less salt

- Eat fresh food most of the time.
- Eat fresh or frozen vegetables and fruit.
- Put the salt shaker away. Reduce the amount of salt you add to your food while cooking, baking or eating at the table.
- Cut down on prepared and processed foods.
- Choose products labelled as low sodium, sodium reduced or no salt added.
- Try other seasonings, such as garlic, lemon juice and fresh or dried herbs.
- When eating out, ask for nutritional information and select meals that are lower in sodium.

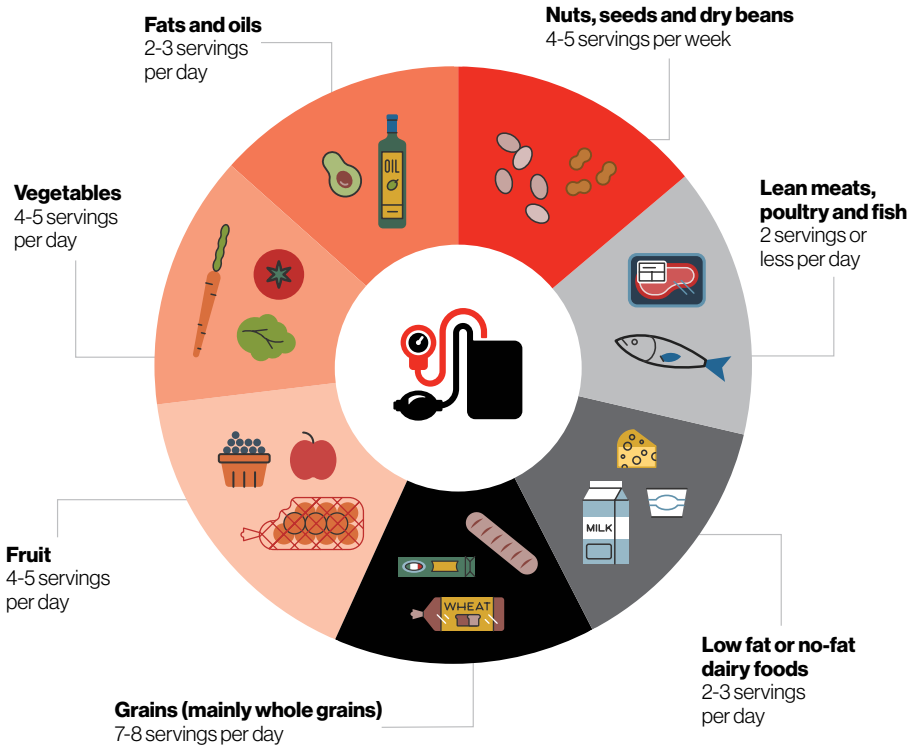


Follow a healthy, balanced eating pattern

- Fill half your plate with vegetables and fruit at every meal.
- Make meals at home. This gives you the ability to choose whole foods over processed ones and control how much salt you add.
- Stay hydrated with water throughout the day.
- Learn more about taking a lifelong approach to healthy eating using the DASH eating plan. It's based on prescribed daily and weekly servings of different food groups:

What is the DASH diet?

The DASH diet encourages eating plenty of vegetables, fruit, low-fat dairy, whole grains, fish, poultry, nuts and legumes. It also limits salt, saturated fats, sugary foods and red or processed meats.



Eat foods high in potassium

- This includes potassium-rich vegetables, fruit, beans and low-fat dairy — unless your healthcare provider has told you otherwise.

Aim for a healthy weight for your body

- Even small changes (5–10% weight loss) can help lower your blood pressure.
- Start with manageable steps and build habits you can maintain.
- Get support from a friend, family member or support group.



A healthcare provider like a Registered Dietitian can help you manage and support healthy blood pressure by providing personalized guidance on nutrition and dietary habits — such as following the DASH diet, reducing salt intake or maintaining a healthy weight for your body — to help you reach your goals.





Be active

- Aim for 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous aerobic physical activity spread over the week.
- Start small, set weekly goals and build up your activity over time.
- Choose activities that you enjoy, such as walking, biking or swimming.
- Before starting a physical activity program, talk to a healthcare provider about what is right for you.

Reduce or quit nicotine use (tobacco, e-cigarettes/vapes and other nicotine products)

- Talk to your healthcare provider to develop a quit plan that is tailored to your needs.
- Set small, achievable goals to reduce usage.
- Get support through counselling, quit programs or nicotine replacement therapy. Explore the Government of Canada's quit smoking resources for more support.
- Lean on friends, family or support groups for encouragement.



Quitting isn't easy, but it's one of the most important things you can do to prevent heart disease and stroke.

If you drink alcohol, drink less

- Frequency and amount of alcohol consumption can impact your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to small amounts, pace yourself and drink plenty of water at the same time.
- Don't hesitate to seek support from friends, family or a professional, if you need it.



Drinking alcohol — especially in higher amounts — can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Manage your stress

- Recognize what causes you stress.
- Take a short break away from your regular routine to reset.
- Build physical activity into your day.
- Talk to people you trust.
- Try relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or mindfulness meditation.
- Make time for activities you enjoy.
- Seek professional support for managing stress and mental health, if needed.



Stress can cause the heart to work harder and increase blood pressure.

Medications for high blood pressure

Lifestyle changes can help lower blood pressure, but sometimes they're not enough on their own. Many people with high blood pressure need to take medication too.

Types of medication for high blood pressure

- diuretics (water pills)
- ACE inhibitors (Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors)
- ARBs (Angiotensin receptor blockers)
- calcium channel blockers
- beta blockers.



Since blood pressure medications work in different ways, your healthcare provider will choose the ones that are right for you and your health needs. Keeping the name and dose of each medication you take — in your wallet or on your phone — can be helpful. Using the same pharmacist for all your prescriptions also makes it easier for them to see the full picture and support you with your medications and refills.

When taking your blood pressure medication

- Take it exactly as directed by your healthcare provider or pharmacist.
- Keep taking it even when your numbers return to normal — this means the medication is working.
- Don't stop taking medications without talking to your healthcare provider.
- Report side effects to your healthcare provider.
- If you miss a dose, contact your healthcare provider or pharmacist for guidance on the safest next steps.
- Before taking any new medications, including over-the-counter supplements for other health concerns, talk with your healthcare provider or pharmacist. They can help you understand how your medications work together and whether anything could affect your blood pressure treatment.



Top tips to remember to take your medication

- 1.** Keep it somewhere visible, such as next to your toothbrush — just make sure it's out of reach of children and pets.
- 2.** Use a pill organizer with separate compartments for each day. A quick glance can help you see if you've taken your medication or still need to.
- 3.** Take your medication at the same time every day, as recommended by your healthcare provider, to help make it part of your routine.
- 4.** Set daily reminders on your watch, phone, tablet or computer for an extra nudge.

Checking your blood pressure at home

To check your blood pressure at home, you need a validated blood pressure monitor. If you're looking to buy a monitor and you're not sure what type to buy, check the Hypertension Canada website for suggestions. A healthcare provider can also help you choose one with a cuff that fits your arm.

How to take a blood pressure reading

Before measurement:

- Avoid exercise, smoking or consuming caffeinated beverages (such as coffee, tea, cola or energy drinks) for at least 30 minutes beforehand.
- Don't take your blood pressure when you're feeling upset, anxious or in pain.
- Empty your bladder or bowels beforehand, if needed.
- Sit quietly for 1–5 minutes before starting.

During measurement:

- Sit with your legs uncrossed, feet flat on the floor and back supported by a chair or firm surface.
- Remain still and relaxed throughout the measurement.
- Remove any tight or bulky clothing from your upper arm.
- Rest your arm on a table or firm surface, ensuring it's supported and that the middle of the blood pressure monitor cuff is positioned at heart level. Use the same arm each time.
- Wrap the cuff snugly around your bare upper arm. You should be able to fit two fingers between the cuff and your arm. The bottom edge of the cuff should be about 3 cm above your elbow crease.
- Don't talk, look at your phone, use a computer or watch TV during the measurement.



Important:

Always read the instructions on how to use your blood pressure monitor. Ask a healthcare provider for help if you're not sure that the cuff is in the right place.

Taking readings:

- Take one reading.
- Then take one more reading, waiting at least one minute after the first.
- Record all readings.

After measurement:

- Bring your recorded readings to your next appointment with your healthcare provider.

How often to check your blood pressure

• If you have high blood pressure or are being assessed

- Your healthcare provider may ask you to measure twice daily (morning and evening) for a short period of time — such as for seven days — when starting or changing medication or to track patterns and guide your care. After that, they'll advise you on how often to check your blood pressure at home or with a healthcare provider to monitor it over time.

• If you do not have high blood pressure

- Check your blood pressure occasionally, as advised by your healthcare provider, such as at:
 - routine medical visits
 - a pharmacy
 - home.



Setting yourself up for success

As you begin using what you've learned to manage your blood pressure, these tips can help you stay motivated and build habits that last:

- ✓ **Start with small, manageable goals.** Big changes can feel overwhelming, so break them into steps that fit your daily life — for example, try walking 10 minutes a day, three times a week instead of aiming for 30 minutes every day.
- ✓ **Take one step at a time.** As habits become easier, set new goals and build from there.
- ✓ **Notice what's getting in the way.** If you feel stuck, look at what might be holding you back.
- ✓ **Keep track of what you're doing.** Write down your blood pressure readings, medications, meals or physical activity. Look for patterns — they can help you understand what's working.
- ✓ **Don't give up. Setbacks happen.** Refocus, keep going and celebrate your progress.



Try this: Our Risk Screen tool gives you a personalized risk profile and action plan to help you take charge of your risks. Knowledge is power. Action is self-care.

riskscreen.heartandstroke.ca

We can help with tips and advice for managing your blood pressure and how to make healthy changes.

Visit heartandstroke.ca/bloodpressure





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