

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Questions
Answers



Why is it important to treat high blood pressure?

As show below, if high blood pressure is left untreated, the consequences can be deadly or disabling: stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney failure, premature death, etc.

What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. This pressure is always given as two numbers (for example 120/80 millimeters of mercury - mm Hg). The higher number (systolic pressure) is when the heart beats, pumping the blood. The lower number (diastolic pressure) is when the heart is at rest, between beats. Your blood pressure fluctuates throughout the day, and is lowest at night when you sleep.

What is high blood pressure?

A blood pressure of 140/90 mm Hg or higher is considered high blood pressure (hypertension) in the general population, or 130/80 mm Hg or higher for people with diabetes. If you have high blood pressure, your risk of developing cardiovascular complications increases.

In Canada, one in five adults has high blood pressure. The risk of developing this disease increases with age. Nine out of ten Canadians between the age of 55 and 65 who don't have high blood pressure will develop the disease if they live to 85. One in six adults ignore they have high blood pressure, although it's easy to diagnose with a simple blood pressure measurement.

High blood pressure is often referred to as the "silent killer" because there are usually no symptoms, unlike most other health problems.

Complications involving the brain:

- Stroke
- Bleeding in the brain

Complications involving the eyes:

Bleeding in the retina

Complications involving the heart:

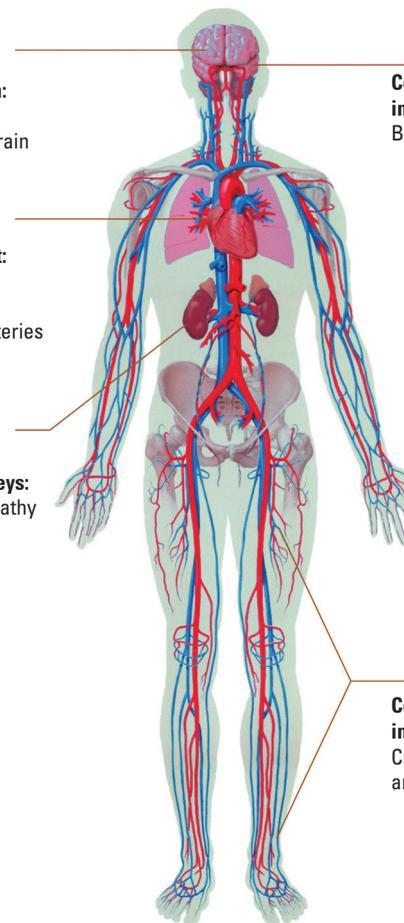
- Heart attack
- Angina
- Clogged heart arteries
- Heart failure

Complications involving the kidneys:

- Diabetic nephropathy (kidney disease)
- Kidney failure

Complications involving the arteries:

Claudication (limping) and leg pain



How is high blood pressure treated?

Although high blood pressure usually can't be cured, it can be prevented or controlled by adopting a healthy lifestyle and by taking medication.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

- Limit alcohol to 14 drinks per week for men and 9 drinks per week for women (one standard drink is considered to be approximately 44 mL of 40% spirits, 355 mL of 5% beer or 148 mL of 12% wine).
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.
- Limit salt intake (the tolerable upper intake level of sodium is **2 000 mg** or less per day for adults or one teaspoon of salt per day, including the salt from prepared foods).
- Exercise regularly (moderate intensity, most days of the week).
- Quit smoking.

DRUG THERAPY

Medication is often required to treat high blood pressure if lifestyle changes are not enough. Unlike other medications, like antibiotics, antihypertensive drugs don't cure the disease, so they have to be taken for life. If you stop taking your medication, your blood pressure will increase to its previous high level or maybe even higher, which can be dangerous.

You may need more than one medication to control your high blood pressure. There are several types of medications available that have different, complementary mechanisms of action: some relax the blood vessels, others flush out excess water and sodium, while others make the heart beat slower, etc.

What are target blood pressure levels?

The aim of treatment is to bring your blood pressure under control.

Conditions	Target SBP / DBP mmHg
Systolic / diastolic hypertension	< 140/90
BP measurement at home In the absence of diabetes	< 135/85
Diabetes	< 130/80
Hypertension in the very elderly (80 years and older)	SBP < 150

SBP: systolic blood pressure - DBP: diastolic blood pressure

How do I measure my blood pressure?

You can measure your own blood pressure at home. Your doctor or pharmacist can recommend a monitor that is easy to use.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU MEASURE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE ACCURATELY:

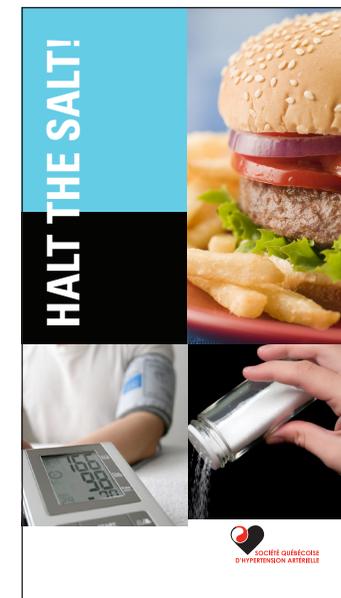
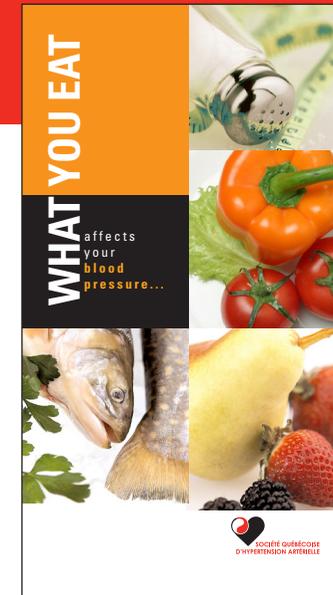
- Start by sitting comfortably for five minutes, with your back supported and your feet flat on the floor. Don't cross your legs.
- Make sure that you are using the right cuff size. Consult your pharmacist or physician to determine the proper size.
- Measure your blood pressure in a quiet place, twice in the morning before you take your medication and twice at the end of the day, with a 1-minute interval between each measurement.
- Record the date, time, systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, and heart rate.
- Bring your monitor with you to your doctor's office or pharmacist twice a year to check your technique and the accuracy of the monitor.

How can I prevent the complications of high blood pressure?

Controlling your blood pressure can significantly reduce complications that affect your heart, brain and kidneys.

Do you want to learn more about how to control your blood pressure?

Others leaflets available :



An initiative of members of the Société québécoise d'hypertension artérielle

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