



## A Guide for Patients: Diagnosis of Hypertension

### What is hypertension?

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Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure, in which the pressure on your arteries is higher than it should be. Blood pressure refers to the force of blood against the blood vessel walls as it circulates through your body. Naturally, a person's blood pressure rises and falls during the day. However, when blood pressure constantly stays higher than normal pressure a person is considered to have hypertension. A normal blood pressure is considered 140/90 mm Hg, but this may vary depending on the individual's factors.

Discuss with your health care professional what measurements are desirable for you.

**My desirable blood pressure is:**

\_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ mm Hg

### What causes hypertension?

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For about 90 - 95% of peoples with mildly elevated blood pressure, inactive lifestyle, smoking, excess abdominal weight, a fatty diet, alcohol consumption and stress contribute to the condition. For the other 5 - 10% of people, there may be a serious underlying cause of high blood pressure that requires urgent medical attention.

Risk factors for developing hypertension that you can control include lifestyle choices such as:

- Smoking
- Physical inactivity
- Excess weight (especially around the waist)
- High-fat diet
- Excessive salt intake
- Excessive alcohol consumption

Risk factors for developing hypertension that you cannot change are:

- Family history of hypertension, heart disease or stroke
- Age (45 years or older for men; 55 years or older for women)
- Ethnicity (including South Asian, African descent)

Another cause of hypertension may be the use of prescription drugs (such as steroids, oral contraceptives, decongestants and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs).

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

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Unfortunately, a person with high blood pressure usually does not see or feel any obvious symptoms of hypertension. To confirm you have hypertension, you need to consult a health care professional. Normally this requires several blood pressure measurements at various times.

## How can I measure my blood pressure?

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There are several ways your blood pressure can be measured, including:

- By a health care professional at their office
- Using an ambulatory blood pressure monitoring device
- Using a home blood pressure monitoring device
- Using a blood pressure monitoring device in a public place (e.g., pharmacy).

For accurate blood pressure measurements, it is important to follow these ABC's:

- **A**chieve a calm state – sit comfortably for 5 minutes, quiet and relaxed. Do not smoke, drink caffeine or alcohol, or exercise within 30 minutes before taking the measurement.
- **B**ody posture – sit in a chair with back supported, both feet on the floor with the legs uncrossed, and the arm bare and supported at heart level.

- **C**alibrate & check equipment – use a properly calibrated and validated instrument. Ensure you use the correct cuff size and position the cuff in the mid-way between the elbow and shoulder. For home blood pressure devices, a list of validated devices is listed on Hypertension Canada's website ([www.hypertension.ca](http://www.hypertension.ca)) and ensure it has the endorsement logo on their package.



## What else do I need to know if I am using a home blood pressure monitoring device?

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- Confirm with your health care professional which arm you should use for measurements.
- Twice a day (once in the morning and once in the evening), take two measurements using the same arm. Wait one minute in between measurements. In the morning, measure blood pressure twice before taking medication and eating, and after your bladder and bowels are empty. In the evening, measure blood pressure twice before taking medication and before going to bed.
- Record the date and time of both measurements. A blood pressure log and further information can be found on the Hypertension Canada's website ([www.hypertension.ca/en/public](http://www.hypertension.ca/en/public))

## What else do I need to know if I am using an ambulatory blood pressure monitoring device?

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- Ambulatory blood pressure monitoring includes having a small digital blood pressure monitor attached to a belt around your waist and connected to a cuff around your upper arm. It is small enough for you to carry on with your normal daily life, though some individuals may find it uncomfortable for the 24-hour monitoring period.
- It is important to keep the device in the correct position on the arm and dry (e.g., no showers, baths or heavy sweating).
- When the machine is about to take a measurement, try to: sit down with legs uncrossed, keep the cuff at the same level as your heart, and arm still.
- It is recommended that you do not drive or do vigorous exercise during the monitoring period.
- Keep a diary of your activities each time a measurement is taken. Also include what time you went to sleep. An activity diary and further information can be found on the British Hypertension Society's website ([www.bhsoc.org/resources/abpm/](http://www.bhsoc.org/resources/abpm/)).

## How can I find out more about hypertension?

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- **Hypertension Canada**, [www.hypertension.ca](http://www.hypertension.ca)
- **Heart and Stroke Foundation**, [www.heartandstroke.bc.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.bc.ca)
- **HealthLinkBC**, [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca) or by telephone (toll free) 8-1-1 or 7-1-1 (for the hearing impaired)
- **British Hypertension Society**, [www.bhsoc.org/](http://www.bhsoc.org/)