



A Guide for Patients: Management of Hypertension

What are my desirable blood pressure measurements?

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 are the complications of hypertension?

Hypertension can lead to a number of potentially life-threatening conditions if it is not controlled or treated. The higher your blood pressure, the greater your risk of developing the following problems:

- Heart disease: Hypertension is a major risk factor for heart attack, and the number one risk factor congestive heart failure.
- Stroke: Hypertension is the leading risk factor for stroke. Very high blood pressure can cause a weakened blood vessel to rupture and bleed into the brain. A blood clot blocking a narrowed artery can also cause a stroke.
- Chronic kidney disease (or CKD): Hypertension is the second leading cause of CKD (diabetes is its leading cause) and kidney failure requiring dialysis or transplant.
- Retinopathy (eye damage): Hypertension can cause small blood vessels in the eye to burst or bleed. This can lead to blurred vision or even blindness.
- Peripheral vascular disease (or PVD): Hypertension is an important risk factor for PVD, which is a narrowing and hardening of arteries that leads to restricted blood flow to the legs, arms, stomach or kidneys.
- Impotence or erectile dysfunction: Hypertension is a common cause of erectile dysfunction in males. Hypertension can lead to changes in the blood vessels that may prevent blood from filling the penis or from remaining there long enough to maintain an erection.

How can I reduce my blood pressure?

Discuss with your health care professional what the best management plan is for you. This plan may include lifestyle changes and/or being prescribed an anti-hypertensive medication.

Lifestyle changes may include:

- Stop smoking
- Exercise regularly
- Maintaining a healthy body weight
- Eating a well-balanced diet (e.g., DASH diet) – which include monitoring sodium/salt intake
- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Relaxation therapies.

Medications work in different ways to help lower blood pressure. You may be prescribed one or more of the following drugs:

- Diuretics – which rids the body of excess salt and water
- Beta blockers – which reduces the heart rate and the heart's output of blood
- Vasodilators, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors (ACE-I), angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARBs) and calcium channel blockers – which relax and open up the narrowed blood vessels.

What should I know about taking medications?

- Take medication only as prescribed and do not stop taking medications on your own.
- Ensure you are aware of any side-effects or what other substances (e.g., cold medicines) that may interfere with your anti-hypertensive medications. Tell your health care professional of any side effects. Side-effects depends on which drugs you are taking, but common side effects include:
 - ✓ Weakness, tiredness or drowsiness - Avoid getting up quickly from a seated or lying position, as this can cause dizziness and lead to falls
 - ✓ Cold hands and feet
 - ✓ Depression or sluggishness
 - ✓ Slow or fast heartbeat
 - ✓ Impotence
 - ✓ Skin rash
 - ✓ Loss of taste or dry mouth
 - ✓ Dry, constant cough, stuffy nose or asthma symptoms
 - ✓ Ankle swelling, leg cramps or aches in the joints
 - ✓ Headache, dizziness or swelling around the eyes
 - ✓ Constipation or diarrhea
 - ✓ Fever or anemia
- Ensure the medications are stored as instructed by your health care professional.
- Medications only work when you take it regularly, so it is important to remember to take them. To help remember to take your medications:
 - ✓ Take them at the same time each day, at a meal or another daily event (e.g., brushing your teeth)
 - ✓ Use a weekly pill box with separate compartments for each day, or time of day
 - ✓ Use a medicine calendar, and note every time you take your dose.

Should I use home blood pressure monitoring for my management?

Tracking your blood pressure using a home blood pressure monitoring can help you see the benefits of treatment and lifestyle changes. It may also remind you to take to stick to your management plan. However, even after your blood pressure is lower, you may still need to take medicine – do not stop taking medications unless directed by a health care professional.

How can I find out more about hypertension?

- **BC Guidelines: Lifestyle & Self-Management Supplement**, www.BCGuidelines.ca
- **Hypertension Canada**, www.hypertension.ca
- **Heart and Stroke Foundation**, www.heartandstroke.bc.ca
- **HealthLinkBC**, 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/