Hypertension CANADA



Blood Pressure Action Plan



Keeping your blood pressure in the healthy range can be as simple as having a plan – and sticking to it. Make sure to work with your health care professional when creating an action plan that is healthy and sustainable for years to come.

Food for thought

Eating a healthy diet is one of the most important lifestyle changes you can make to control your blood pressure. Think about the foods you eat now – is your diet balanced and low in sodium? Read this section carefully for tips on making healthy choices at home, at social functions, or at restaurants.

How much salt is too much?

You have probably heard that eating low-sodium foods can lower your blood pressure. Adults are encouraged to keep their daily sodium intake to less than 2000 mg. Read nutritional labels carefully and limit your salt intake. You'll find that over time, you may develop a preference for foods with less salt. It is not uncommon to find that some processed foods or restaurant foods taste too salty after a while.

Salt/sodium intake guide per serving

	Sodium (mg)	% of Daily Value (DV)
Too much	> 360	≥ 15%
Watch out	121 – 360	6 – 14%
Go ahead	0 – 120	0 – 5%

Shopping tip

Read Nutritional Facts tables when buying groceries, and chose products that are labeled with 5% or less Daily Value of sodium and 15% or more of fibre.



The DASH Diet

The Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet is similar to Canada's Food Guide and has proven to lower blood pressure. The DASH diet emphasizes eating plenty of vegetables and fruits, low-fat milk products, whole grains, lean meats, fish, dried beans, and nuts. Following the DASH diet and limiting your sodium intake to less than 2000 mg each day is the best way to manage your blood pressure with food.

Food group	Daily serving	Examples and notes
Whole grains	6-8	Whole wheat breads, cereal, oatmeal, rice, pasta, quinoa, barley, low-fat, low-sodium crackers
Vegetables	4-5	Dark green and orange (fresh or frozen)
Fruits	4-5	Apricots, bananas, grapes, oranges, grapefruit, melons, peaches, berries, mango
Low-fat or fat-free milk foods, or alternatives	2-3	Skim, 1% milk, fortified soy beverage or yogurt, 6-18% M.F. (milk fat) cheese
Meats, poultry, fish	Less than 6 oz	Select only lean meats. Choose fish like char, herring, mackerel, salmon, sardines and trout. Trim away fats. Broil, roast or boil and avoid frying. Remove skin from poultry. When choosing deli meats, look for a low sodium and low fat option
Nuts, seeds, legumes	4-5 per week	Almonds, peanuts, walnuts, sunflower seeds, soybeans, lentils, chick peas, dried peas and beans, tofu
Fats and oils	2–3 tsp	Soft margarines, mayonnaise, vegetable oil (olive, corn, canola, or safflower), salad dressing
Sweets	Less than 5 tbsp per week	Sugar, jelly, jam, hard candy, ice cream, syrups, sorbet, chocolate

Quick healthy eating tips:



- Buy fresh or frozen vegetables instead of canned or packaged vegetables with added sauces.
- Choose low-sodium vegetable juices and soups.
- Choose at least three higher fibre whole grain foods per day.
- Choose products with higher fibre, lower fat, and lower sodium when buying breads, crackers, cereals, bakery products, desserts, and snacks.
- Buy skim or 1% milk and yogurt more often than cheese.
- Limit processed cheese slices and spreads.
- Have smaller portions of meats, fish, and poultry.
- Eat a small handful of unsalted nuts and seeds several times a week.
- Limit processed, cured, smoked, or deli meats.
- Check food labels and choose sweets and snack foods with the lowest amount of sodium and saturated or trans fats.



Maintain a healthy weight

If you are overweight, you can start by losing 10 pounds (4-5 kg) to lower your blood pressure. Ensure your weight loss program is based on a balanced diet that is reduced in calories and includes physical activity. Find a physical activity that you enjoy and invite your family and friends to join you. Walk and take the stairs whenever possible and increase your activity levels 10 minutes at a time. You'll be shocked by how quickly your body adapts to your new active lifestyle. Be sure to consult with your health care professional before beginning any exercise or weight loss program.

Refrain from smoking

Quitting smoking can significantly improve your blood pressure and heart health. It may take several attempts to quit for good – so keep trying! Consult with your health care professional to find tips and tools to help you quit smoking.



Limit alcohol consumption

Drinking more than moderate amounts of alcohol can raise blood pressure by several points, and can reduce the effectiveness of high blood pressure medications.

- A drink is defined as 5 oz (148 ml) of wine, 1.5 oz (44 ml) of distilled alcohol (rum, vodka, rye, etc.) and 12 oz (355 ml) of beer, cider or coolers.
- Drinking no more than a maximum of two alcoholic drinks per day can lower your blood pressure.
- Consumption should not exceed 14 standard drinks per week for men and 9 per week for women.



Aim for stress-free living

Stressful events in our lives can produce a great deal of internal anxiety. Learn to recognize the things you can and cannot control. Try learning relaxation techniques, exercising, setting realistic goals and talking with loved ones or a therapist during particularly difficult times.

Create your hypertension support system

It's normal to have questions or concerns after your hypertension diagnosis. You may even feel a little bit anxious or scared. Remember, you are not alone. Consider creating your personal hypertension support system made up of family, friends, and your health care professionals. Share this resource with your loved ones and have them create their personal action plans. You can celebrate each other's successes and support those who may be struggling.



Take your medications as prescribed

Once diagnosed with hypertension, medication is almost always needed to bring blood pressure within a normal range. Don't see that as a failure – it's not. Learn about the medication you're prescribed, and take it as directed to reduce your risk of health complications like stroke and heart disease. You may not feel any different when taking your medication, which is a good thing because you're not meant to feel any different. The medication is still working.

Less frequently, you may experience some side effects from medication and most diminish over time. Be patient. Stopping a medication can cause your blood pressure to rise to dangerous levels. While the medication has controlled your blood pressure, your hypertension has not been cured. Once you have hypertension, you will likely have it for the rest of your life.

Important note:

Take your medication as prescribed, and if any side effects develop, consult your health care professional. Before taking other medications, speak with your pharmacist about any contraindications, and do not stop your medication without speaking to your health care professional first.



Tips for remembering to take your medication:

- Place your medication next to the cup or bowl you use for your meals, or beside your toothbrush.
- Use a "Pill Box" or Dosette® or Dispill® to organize multiple medications. You can also ask your pharmacist about "blister packs".
- Take your medication at the same time of day, every day. Check with your health care professional for the recommended time of day.

Prepare for check-ups and appointments with your health care professionals:

- Write down your symptoms (when they started and how often they occur), your medications, drug allergies, your personal health history, family diseases, and recent medical history.
- If you're asked to, monitor your blood pressure at home. You can download a blood pressure log to help you at hypertension.ca.
- When seeing your health care professional, explain the reason for your visit clearly. Do not be afraid to discuss what's worrying you and ask questions if you do not understand something.
- Write down all instructions and advice your health care professional gives you.
- The questions your health care professional asks during the visit are the cornerstone of the consultation. The information you give is always useful, as it helps to assess your situation and recommend an appropriate course of action.

My Action Plan

Congratulations on creating an action plan that will improve your health! Look through the list of healthy habits listed below, and mark the box next to the ones you feel you are ready to make. Lasting lifestyle changes take time to implement, so work on making one healthy change at a time. Celebrate each successful change you make and be kind to yourself if you struggle with a few; that is perfectly normal.

I will (see previous pages for tips):

☐ Reduce my daily salt/sodium consumption.
  ☐ I am consuming less than 2000 mg of sodium per day.

☐ Eat healthy to maintain healthy blood pressure.
  ☐ I am eating healthier.

☐ Maintain a healthy weight.
  ☐ I am keeping or working towards a healthier weight (BMI: 20–25).

☐ Be physically active.
  ☐ I am physically active for at least 30 minutes, five to six days per week.

☐ Refrain from smoking.
  ☐ I am quitting or have stopped smoking.

☐ Limit my alcohol consumption.
  ☐ I am staying within the healthly range.

☐ Aim for stress-free living.
  ☐ I am learning to live a more stress-free life.

☐ Take my medication(s) as prescribed.
  ☐ I take my medication regularly as prescribed.

☐ Remember to go to my health care professional appointments.
  ☐ I go to my health care professional regularly for check-ups.

I will take other actions such as:

Notes & Questions for my Doctor

Notes & Questions for my Doctor

For more information, and other resources to help you prevent and control hypertension, visit **hypertension.ca**.

This brochure provides practical information based on Hypertension Canada's clinical practice guidelines for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of hypertension. Hypertension Canada's Resource Review Committee has reviewed the content of this brochure for accuracy, reliability, and helpfulness to the intended audience.

This brochure should not replace consultation with, or care instructions provided by, health care professionals.

If you have questions about your medical situation, speak to your health care professional.

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