

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Many have it and don't know it and it can be deadly if not controlled.

Blood pressure is a measure of the pressure on the inside of our blood vessels as the blood circulates. High blood pressure (hypertension) is easily diagnosed with a blood pressure test. Two numbers make up a blood pressure reading. The top number indicates the systolic pressure that is the pressure the heart generates while pumping the blood to all parts of the body. The lower number is the diastolic pressure, a measure of the pressure in the arteries between beats or when the heart is temporarily at rest.

A normal blood pressure reading is usually 120/80 or lower. Your doctor diagnoses high blood pressure when the blood pressure is 140/90 or greater. The trouble with HBP is you can't feel it. So it quietly goes about doing its harm without your knowing it. Besides affecting your heart and kidneys, it can also affect your vision, sex life and is even implicated in being a contributor to dementia.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HBP) INFORMATION:

HBP affects many people. It is estimated that one in four Canadians suffer from it but the tragedy is that many of them don't know they have it. For this reason it is called "the silent killer". It is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. This is especially true as we grow older. Once diagnosed, it is necessary to make some changes in your life because even a small drop in blood pressure (e.g. 10/5) can reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke and death. For a healthy heart, lowering blood pressure is only one of six factors that are important. The others are to stop smoking, keep your cholesterol in check, reduce if overweight, increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and put more exercise back in your life.

HOW TO TAKE YOUR OWN BLOOD PRESSURE

- Buy a good quality blood pressure kit.
- Relax with no distractions for 5 minutes before testing. While taking your blood pressure, don't talk or watch TV.
- Ideally, it's good to wait for two hours after a large meal or 30 minutes after coffee or smoking. These activities can raise blood pressure.
- If you are uncomfortable due to a full bladder or need a bowel movement, take care of these first. Ideally wait for 30 minutes after using the bathroom.
- Sit in a chair that supports your back and place your arm so that it is at the same level as your heart. Keep your feet flat on the floor, legs uncrossed.
- It is important that the blood pressure cuff is the right size and correctly positioned at mid-point on the upper arm.
- Take two readings each day, one in the morning before breakfast and medications and one in the evening before bathing and medications. Record the date and time of each reading. Note whether you took the reading while you were sitting or standing.
- Keep a record of your readings. These can be helpful when you visit your doctor.

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