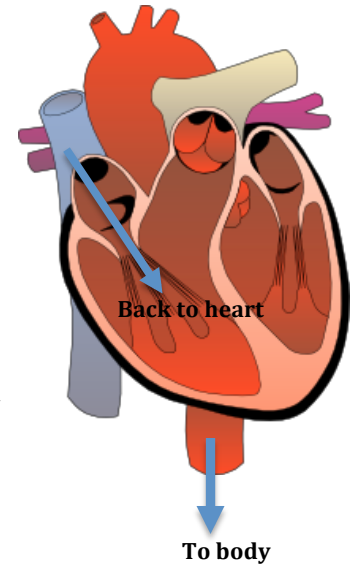


# High Blood Pressure

## The Heart

The heart is like a pump that sends blood to the rest of the body through a piping system made up of blood vessels. The blood then brings nutrients such as oxygen, sugar, and vitamins to our muscles, organs, and brain.



## What is blood pressure?

The heart pumps the blood through the blood vessels at a certain pressure, like turning on a garden hose. When you turn up the tap, the water starts coming out faster and stronger. This is the same as when the heart beats faster and harder, for example when you are running. When you turn the tap down, the water starts to flow out in a trickle. This is the same as when the heart slows down, for example when you lie down and relax. The stronger the blood flows, the higher the blood pressure is.

## What does it mean to have high blood pressure?

As you can see, it is normal and healthy for our blood pressure to change throughout the day in response to our activities, so even if it is higher during exercise, it is not necessarily a problem. It becomes a health concern when it remains high for most or all of the time.

The medical term for high blood pressure is *hypertension*.

## How can I tell if I have high blood pressure?

Most people do not have any symptoms that tell them they have high blood pressure. They usually find out when their doctor takes their blood pressure.

You should get your blood pressure checked if you have the following symptoms: headache, feeling short of breath, dizziness, blurry vision. You may also want to check it if it runs in your family, or just to make sure. You may ask a doctor to check it for you, or use the blood pressure machine at Shoppers Drug Mart.

## Understanding the Values

Blood pressure is shown as 2 numbers – one on top of the other. The top number represents the time when the heart is squeezing, like when you press down on a pump. The bottom number represents the time when the heart is filling back up with blood, like when you release the pump and it fills up with air. It is always more difficult to press down on the pump than it is to let it fill back up, so the top number is always larger than the bottom number.

### What should I aim for?

It is best to have a blood pressure of less than 120/80. Up to 130/85 is still considered normal.

Optimal	120/80 or less
Normal	Up to 130/85
High-Normal	Up to 139/89
Stage 1 (Mild)	Up to 159/99
Stage 2 (Moderate to high)	160/109 or more

## Why do I have high blood pressure?

One of the most common ways of developing high blood pressure is when fats (including cholesterol) and other materials in the blood start caking onto the sides of the blood vessels, like a pipe that is beginning to get clogged. This is called atherosclerosis. When this happens, the blood then has to flow through a much narrower blood vessel. Going back to our garden hose example, this would be the same as when you place your thumb or finger over the nozzle to create a stronger spray without turning up the tap.

High blood pressure can also be caused by natural processes the body uses to make blood vessels narrower. There are muscles in the walls of the blood vessels that control how narrow or wide they are. We need them to be able to do this so that we can control how much blood flows to an area of the body. For example, when you are exercising, your muscles have to work harder, so the body makes those blood vessels wider to send more blood to them. The problem is when blood vessels stay narrow, which can happen with certain drugs, foods, and stress.

Lastly, some people have high blood pressure because it runs in their family. These people can follow the natural health tips below to improve it or prevent it from happening.

## What can I do to take care of my heart naturally?

- ♥ Avoid alcohol, caffeine and smoking. These all raise blood pressure. Try drinking herbal teas such as flower-, rice- or fruit-based teas, or drink decaffeinated coffees or teas.
- ♥ Cut down on salt (sodium). This includes adding less salt to your food when you are cooking or at the table, as well as looking for hidden salt in the sauces (e.g. soy sauce, ketchup) and packaged foods you buy. Check labels for salt and sodium. Opt for products that say “low in salt”, and avoid buying canned or packaged foods or eating out at restaurants. You may also replace your regular salt with “sea salt” or “No-salt”, both of which can be found in the salt section of most grocery stores. Use lemon juice or fresh herbs for flavouring.
- ♥ Cut down on fatty foods. Avoid beef and pork, and eat more chicken, turkey, fish, and tofu. Take the skin off your meats and limit the amount of meat you eat at each meal to a portion that is roughly the size of your palm. Use less oil and butter when you are cooking. Try baking or steaming instead.



- ♥ Eat more fruits and vegetables. These foods benefit the heart and are low in fat and cholesterol.
- ♥ Eat more celery, garlic and onions. These foods have been shown to reduce blood pressure. Try eating 2 stalks of celery per day.
- ♥ Lose weight. Being overweight increases blood pressure.
- ♥ Reduce your stress and anger. When you are stressed or angry, you may notice you can feel your heart pumping harder or hear your heartbeat in your ears. Take some deep breaths or go for a short walk to calm yourself. Try breathing exercises, relaxation visualization, meditation or yoga.
- ♥ Exercise. Exercise helps with weight loss, burning off fat, and relieving stress. Start slow and gradually increase your fitness level. If you have already had a heart attack or been diagnosed with high blood pressure, consult a doctor before introducing a new exercise plan.

## What medications are used for high blood pressure?

Your medical doctor may prescribe you medications to lower your blood pressure. You will still take these while following the guidelines above, but continue to see your doctor for monitoring!

Some common medications used for high blood pressure are:

ACE Inhibitors (e.g. Ramipril)	Relaxes blood vessels to make them wider
Beta blockers (e.g. Metoprolol)	Relaxes the heart
Calcium channel blockers (e.g. Amlodipine)	
Diuretics (e.g. Hydrochlorothiazide)	Makes you pee more to reduce the amount of water in the blood

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