EquaHeart

Hypertension (high blood pressure)

Hypertension affects about **1 in 4 Canadian adults**. It rarely causes symptoms, so regular measurement is the only reliable way to detect it.

1 Understanding your reading

Systolic (top number)
pressure as the heart contracts

128/82 mmHg

Diastolic (bottom number)
between beats

Under 130/80	130/80 to 139/89	140/90 or higher
Below threshold Maintain healthy habits and recheck regularly.	**Hypertension** Lifestyle changes; medication if cardiovascular risk is high.	**Hypertension** Medication is usually started along with lifestyle changes.

Hypertension Canada, 2025. The usual treatment target is a systolic pressure below 130.

2 Why it matters

Over time, elevated pressure damages blood vessels, increasing the risk of:

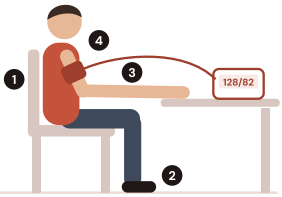
Heart
Myocardial infarction (heart attack) and heart failure

Brain
Stroke and vascular dementia

Kidneys
Chronic kidney disease

Eyes
Retinopathy (damage to the retina)

3 Measuring your blood pressure at home



1. **Back supported.** Sit and rest quietly for up to 5 minutes first.
2. **Feet flat** on the floor, with legs uncrossed.
3. **Arm supported** on a table, with the cuff at heart level.
4. **Cuff on the bare upper arm,** lower edge about 3 cm above the elbow crease.

Use a validated monitor (Hypertension Canada lists recommended devices). Avoid caffeine, smoking and exercise for 30 minutes beforehand. Take **two readings, one minute apart, each morning and evening for seven days**, and bring the record to your appointment.

4 Lifestyle measures

Reduce sodium (salt)
Less than 2,000 mg a day; most comes from processed foods.

Vegetables and fruit
Rich in potassium, which helps lower blood pressure.*

Be physically active
At least 150 minutes a week, such as brisk walking.

Limit alcohol
Two standard drinks or fewer per week is low risk.

Achieve a healthy weight
For people living with obesity, weight loss lowers blood pressure.

Stop smoking
Quitting reduces damage to the heart and blood vessels.

*With kidney disease or certain blood pressure medications, consult your healthcare provider before increasing potassium.

5 Medication

Many people also require medication, often **two medications at low doses combined in a single pill**. Take it daily, even when you feel well, and do not stop without speaking to your doctor or pharmacist.

911 **Call 911** if your reading is **180/120 or higher** with chest pain, shortness of breath, or signs of stroke (facial drooping, arm weakness or difficulty speaking). Without symptoms, rest and recheck; if it remains this high, seek same-day care.

Sources: Goupil R, et al. Hypertension Canada guideline for the diagnosis and treatment of hypertension in adults in primary care. CMAJ 2025. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health, 2023. Mayo Clinic, Hypertensive crisis.

This guide is general information and does not replace advice from your healthcare provider.

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