

## How is blood pressure lowered?

Making certain changes to your lifestyle can lower blood pressure. These are described in detail below. If lifestyle and diet changes are not enough to lower blood pressure to target levels, antihypertensive medication may be prescribed, but lifestyle and diet modifications should be maintained.

Compare your target BP to your current BP, and discuss with your physician which of the following changes might be useful to you in your blood pressure management program.

Lifestyle change	How does it help?	How much could it affect my BP...	
		Up to...in SBP?*	Up to...in DBP?*
<b>Exercise regularly</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30-60 minutes of dynamic exercise, 4 or more times per week</li> <li>Includes walking, swimming, cycling, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes weight loss by burning fat and increasing metabolism</li> <li>Increases cardiovascular fitness</li> </ul>	Exercising only 3x/week can result in ↓ 10.3 mmHg	Exercising only 3x/week can result in ↓ 7.5 mmHg
<b>Eat a low-fat, high-fiber diet (e.g., the DASH diet)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4-5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day</li> <li>Low in cholesterol and saturated fat</li> <li>Low-fat dairy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduces BP in people with and without hypertension</li> <li>Starts to show benefits within 2 weeks</li> </ul>	↓ 11.4 mmHg	↓ 5.5 mmHg
<b>Lose weight, if overweight</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Overweight" involves having a Body Mass Index higher than 25</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The heart doesn't have to work as hard</li> <li>Reduces the risk of dyslipidemia, diabetes and fatal heart attack</li> </ul>	Losing 4.5 kg can result in ↓ 7.2 mmHg	Losing 4.5 kg can result in ↓ 5.9 mmHg
<b>Reduce salt intake</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommended daily limit is about 1 teaspoon of table salt per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The more salt there is in the blood, the more water, and the more work for the heart</li> <li>Reducing salt intake reduces the work of the heart</li> </ul>	↓ 5.8 mmHg	↓ 2.5 mmHg
<b>Limit alcohol consumption</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less than two units of alcohol per day</li> <li>Weekly maximum of 14 for men and 9 for women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excessive alcohol intake is an important risk factor for high BP</li> <li>Can cause resistance to antihypertensive therapy</li> <li>Risk factor for stroke</li> </ul>	Reducing by 2.7 drinks can result in ↓ 4.6 mmHg	Reducing by 2.7 drinks can result in ↓ 2.3 mmHg
<b>Quit smoking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Smoking is a powerful risk factor for CVD</li> </ul>	—	—
<b>Manage stress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional stress puts stress on the body and heart</li> </ul>	—	—

The above recommendations for healthy modifications are based on the 2005 Canadian Recommendations for the Management of Hypertension. Please note that the effects of several measures may not be additive.

\*SBP=Systolic Blood Pressure; DBP=Diastolic Blood Pressure.



Remember:  
*Rome wasn't built in a day!*

Changing our lifestyles takes time and practice. Make changes gradually and celebrate small victories.

## Where can I get more information?

For more information on lifestyle changes that can help lower BP, consult the following websites:

- Health Canada ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca))
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada ([www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca))



# Preventing and Managing Hypertension Through Lifestyle Change

## What is high blood pressure?

When blood passes through the body, it exerts force on the artery walls. This force is called "blood pressure" (BP). There are two blood pressure measurements: systolic measures are taken as the heart beats, and diastolic measures are taken as the heart relaxes between beats.

When blood pressure is high, too much force is being applied to the artery walls, and the heart is being overloaded. High blood pressure (also known as "hypertension") cannot be felt and there are usually no warning signs. Once it is diagnosed, a patient will likely have high blood pressure for life.

## Why is it important to treat high blood pressure?

Having high blood pressure seriously increases the risk of cardiovascular events, (e.g., heart attack, which occurs when the blood supply to the heart is blocked, causing the heart to stop beating; and stroke, which occurs when the blood supply to the brain is blocked, resulting in permanent brain damage). Patients with hypertension have a 35% chance of developing a heart condition as a result of hardened arteries, a 49% chance of experiencing a heart attack, and a 24% chance of dying prematurely as a result of a heart condition or cardiac event. Even if blood pressure is only slightly above normal, there is still an increased risk, and the risk grows as blood pressure rises.

## Keeping track of your blood pressure.

An accurate blood pressure diary can be a very valuable tool in planning a program to lower your blood pressure. Recording measurements at home and bringing these to your next appointment can help your physician understand what changes are working and which ones need to be improved.

Make sure you carefully monitor your blood pressure at home. If you have received the **Get to Goal** brochure entitled *The Home Blood Pressure Monitoring Patient Manual*, you can use the logbook found inside.

## Making the commitment to a healthy lifestyle.

Sometimes it's easier to keep a commitment when you have a reminder. If you like, you can fill out the following agreement with your nurse or physician and put it somewhere where you'll see it every day. It certifies that you are committed to lowering your blood pressure to a healthier level.

### Yes! I am committed to lowering my BP



SBP:

DBP:

My <b>current</b> BP is:	Date:	My <b>target</b> BP is:

- I understand that I have high blood pressure – which puts me at greater risk of cardiovascular disease.
- I understand that certain lifestyle changes can reduce my blood pressure. I intend to make the following changes: (circle the ones you intend to change)

- Eat a low-fat diet
- Eat less salt
- Exercise often
- Reduce stress
- Drink less alcohol
- Lose weight
- Quit smoking

- I understand that blood pressure medication can help reduce my blood pressure. I will take my medication every day as prescribed. If I have trouble remembering to take my pills, or if I have any side effects, I will discuss these with my doctor, nurse or pharmacist in order to work out a system that will be easier for me.

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Patient's signature

**Congratulations!**  
You've just taken  
the first step towards  
better blood pressure  
management!