

Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries as it flows through them. It is measured with two numbers: the top or higher number is the pressure created when the heart contracts while the bottom or lower number occurs when the heart is relaxing between beats. Although 120/80 (“one twenty over eighty”) is considered the “normal” blood pressure level, some variation is acceptable and target blood pressure levels can vary for people with specific health conditions.

Why is blood pressure important for health?

High blood pressure, or hypertension, increases the risk of heart attack, stroke, and kidney and eye damage. Low blood pressure can also be problematic, causing light-headedness, dizziness and fainting.

How can high blood pressure be prevented?

- Have your blood pressure checked at least once every two years. High blood pressure often has no symptoms, so even people with dangerously high blood pressure may feel fine. About half of people with high blood pressure don't know they have it.
- Some of the risk factors affecting blood pressure are uncontrollable. They include age, ethnicity, and a family history of high blood pressure. Blood pressure increases with age and about half of people over the age of 65 have high blood pressure.
- Maintain a healthy body weight by enjoying regular physical activity and healthy eating.
- Limit salt, alcohol, caffeine and sugar intake and refrain from using tobacco products.
- Relieve stress by setting aside time to relax.

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What should I do if I have high blood pressure?

- Ask questions to make sure you understand your condition and follow your doctor's instructions.
- Talk to your doctor about lifestyle changes or medications to lower your blood pressure.
- Take medications as directed. Never stop taking your medication without the advice of a doctor.
- Tell your doctor right away about any new symptoms, side effects or reactions.
- Consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking over-the-counter drugs or herbal medicines as they may interact with blood pressure medication.

For more information, consult:

- A doctor, nurse, or pharmacist
- The Heart and Stroke Foundation of New Brunswick 506-634-1620

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Senior and Healthy Aging Secretariat
PO Box 6000, Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1
Tel. 506-457-6811
seniors@gnb.ca
www.gnb.ca/seniors