

Love Your Heart Today

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Are you experiencing headaches that have no explanation? Dizziness upon rising? Periods of drowsiness or confusion? These may be signs of high blood pressure, a disease that afflicts millions of Canadians a year, including almost half of those over the age of sixty-five. Also termed hypertension, this disease has been termed the silent killer and can strike anyone at any age. If not detected and treated, it can result in serious damage to the heart, kidneys, brain, eyes and other organs.

Ninety-five percent of those suffering from high blood pressure have no identifiable cause. Factors that contribute to this disease include a family history of high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus, high cholesterol, obesity, cigarette smoking, alcohol intake and salt intake. Even too much stress at your job and little time to release it through regular physical activity can put a strain on your heart health.

The good news is that heart disease is preventable and manageable. It starts with checking your blood pressure annually. Blood pressure should be taken when you are calm, and it is best to average a total of three readings, taken on different days. The consensus is that for most healthy adults 120/80 is a normal reading.

The next step in the prevention of hypertension is following a proper diet. The first step is reducing salt. Salt contains sodium, which causes water retention and increases the pressure inside the arteries. Increasing fiber is the second step. Your meals should be based around fresh, raw vegetables and whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds. Consume foods like apples, celery, pomegranates, onions, garlic and parsley daily as they can help protect the heart and help lower cholesterol. Overindulgence of caffeine is a cause of high blood pressure so cutting back on your intake of coffee, pop, chocolate and caffeinated teas is important.

Maintaining a healthy weight is essential in the prevention and management of high blood pressure. Even a few extra pounds around the abdomen can be enough to put you in danger. One recent survey found that three out of four Canadians have a waistband large enough to put their hearts at risk. If you're overweight, even 5 to 10 pounds can lower your pressure significantly. Regular exercise is a safe and effective way to lose those extra pounds and a way to help reduce blood pressure. Yoga can offer cardiovascular exercise and help reduce stress.

Apart from dietary change and exercise, nutrition and herbs play a crucial role in heart health. Herbs can provide antioxidant protection, strengthen the heart muscle and improve overall heart function. Many of the same herbs lower cholesterol significantly

and can prevent and reverse atherosclerotic changes in the blood vessels. *Hawthorn* is an essential heart tonic, increases the strength and regularity of heart, and helps reduce blood pressure. *CoenzymeQ10* plays an important role in the maintenance of the entire cardiovascular system. It is good for high blood pressure and helps maintain heart muscle function. There is a connection between fish oil and the omega-3 fatty acids in fish oil and the regulation of blood pressure when take on a long-term basis. Low levels of the minerals *calcium and magnesium* have been associated with high blood pressure.

The big challenge today is determining when your high blood pressure needs to be treated with medication. It is important that you consult with a health care practitioner if the answer is not clear. If you have severe hypertension, you will likely need medication. So don't wait until it is too late, love your heart today.