

Life Letter *mature*

Steps you can take to control high blood pressure

The Heart and Stroke Foundation tells us that one in five Canadians is affected by high blood pressure. Because there are no obvious symptoms, some 42% of Canadians that have it don't even know. You can't see it or feel it, but you can control it by taking these steps:

Get it checked - You can't do much about something you don't know about. Your doctor should check it at every visit. Consider a home measuring device or visiting your local pharmacy regularly.

Don't just sit there - Regular, moderate exercise can help lower blood pressure, prevent its onset or help lower medication dosages. Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

Stomach it - Eat more fruit, vegetables and whole grains; eat less fried, fatty and processed foods. A healthy diet is critical.

Lose it - If you are too short for your weight, losing some can lower blood pressure. Ask your doctor if you are overweight and for some weight loss strategies.

Butt out - Did you know that smoking one cigarette can cause a 20-point spike in blood pressure? Your lungs will thank you, too.

Less wining - More than one alcoholic drink a day can cause blood pressure to rise. The effect differs by body size.

Stop shaking - Too much sodium and not enough potassium can affect blood pressure. Most North Americans consume far more salt than is needed. Aim for less than 1.5 grams of sodium per day. Read food labels carefully.

Rip Van Winkle - Ongoing lack of sleep can increase blood pressure. Get at least six hours

of sleep per night.

Lower your stress levels - Emotional and mental stress can boost blood pressure. Find ways to relax and remove yourself from stressful situations from time to time. Use up your holiday time.

Stick with the meds - Lifestyle changes alone may not be enough to control blood pressure. If your doctor does prescribe blood pressure pills, take them as directed. Studies have shown that most medication problems arise from taking prescriptions inconsistently or improperly. It is important to tell your doctor about all the drugs you take, even over-the-counter ones, so that the right medicines can be prescribed.

High blood pressure can be lowered by changing daily habits, but medication may also be necessary. Lifestyle changes may help to lower the dose of a prescription and reduce side effects. Remember, high blood pressure may not make you feel sick, so get it checked.

For information purposes only and not intended to provide medical advice. See your doctor regularly and ask questions.

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