BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORING AT HOME
WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure is the force of your blood on the walls of your arteries with each beat of your heart.

Blood pressure is always given as two numbers:

- The top or first number is the blood pressure when your heart beats. This is called systolic pressure.
- The bottom or second number is the pressure remaining in the arteries between beats. This is called diastolic pressure.

Your blood pressure fluctuates throughout the day. This is normal, and is a reflection of how your body adapts to your daily activities (exercise, changes in position, rest, stress, digestion, etc.).

There are times during the day when your pressure will be higher or lower, and this is absolutely normal.

The average of your home blood pressure measurements should be less than:

135 / 85 mm Hg

135 is your systolic pressure and 85 is your diastolic pressure.

Blood pressure that remains elevated over a long period of time can damage your blood vessels or organs.

This long-term elevation in blood pressure is called:

hypertension, or simply high blood pressure

High blood pressure can lead to complications affecting the:

- Heart
- Brain
- Eyes
- Kidneys
HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer”. It doesn’t make you feel sick, so you may not realize that you have a problem.

• By the time you have symptoms like eye trouble, chest pain, or pain when you walk, it means that you have had high blood pressure for quite some time.

• To know if you have high blood pressure, you should have your blood pressure checked by a health professional a few times. This can be a doctor, a nurse or a pharmacist. The professional may also ask you to wear an ambulatory blood pressure monitor to measure your blood pressure over a 24-hour period.

This is a machine that you wear on a belt around your waist, which is attached to a cuff on your arm. The machine measures your blood pressure three or four times an hour during the day and once or twice an hour at night. The readings show your blood pressure throughout the day.

As we age, our arteries react less effectively to changes in blood pressure.

This means that high blood pressure can occur later in life.

• All adults, especially those over age 65, should have their blood pressure checked by a health professional at least once a year at their annual check-ups.
WHY SHOULD I MEASURE MY BLOOD PRESSURE AT HOME?

You can measure your blood pressure at home in addition to having it measured at a clinic by a health professional.

• When you measure your blood pressure at home, you can take multiple readings. These readings can show how your blood pressure varies over a week, and can give a more reliable assessment of your blood pressure over time.

• Sometimes, blood pressure measured at home differs from those measurements taken by a health professional at a clinic or doctor’s office. Readings taken at home can give a more realistic picture of your actual blood pressure.

• If you have already been diagnosed with high blood pressure, home blood pressure measurement can help you monitor your efforts at achieving your target blood pressure (e.g. show the effects of an exercise program).

• Home blood pressure monitoring the week before an appointment with a health professional can help your health care professional determine whether lifestyle or medication changes are needed.

• Measuring your blood pressure at home after a medication change, adjustment or addition can help you and your health professional determine if the onset of problems like dizziness or headaches are associated with medication changes.
WHAT DEVICE SHOULD I CHOOSE?

Choose a device endorsed by the Canadian Hypertension Society*

- Choose an easy-to-use automatic device that has a “memory” or “printout”.
- Choose a device that has numbers that are easy to read, buttons that are easy to press and a cuff that comes with clear instructions on how to put it on.
- The right cuff size is important. Read the instructions on the box to find the size that is right for you.
  If the cuff is too big or too small, the readings can be inaccurate. A health professional can help you select the right cuff size.

* This logo indicates that the device meets international standards

WHEN SHOULD I MEASURE MY BLOOD PRESSURE?

Preparation:
- Rest for 5 minutes before measuring your pressure.
- Wait 30 minutes after physical exertion or cold exposure (even a brisk walk can affect blood pressure).
- Wait an hour after drinking a caffeinated beverage such as coffee, tea or cola.
- Wait two hours after a meal.
- Urinate or move your bowels, if necessary, before measuring your blood pressure.

Measurement:
- Take 2 measurements in the morning when you get up, before taking your medication.
- Take 2 measurements in the evening. You may find it convenient to measure blood pressure when you get home from work or before your evening meal. Otherwise find a convenient and regular time a couple of hours after mealtime, but before taking any medications or bathing.
- Always take two consecutive measurements, at least one minute apart.

Write down all of your results, and be sure to show your readings to your health care professional at your next visit.
HOW DO I MEASURE MY BLOOD PRESSURE?

In some people, blood pressure will be higher in one arm than the other. If this is the case for you, always put the cuff on the arm that has the higher pressure.

Use a chair with an arm rest or sit next to a table, and support your arm so that the cuff is at the level of your heart. Place the cuff on a bare arm. You may need to use a cushion or pillow to make sure that your arm is at the right height. Also make sure that you are relaxed and comfortable with your back supported and legs uncrossed during the reading.

Remain quiet and do not talk during the blood pressure measurement.

If you find it difficult to measure your own blood pressure, ask a family member or friend to help you.

WHAT DO I DO WITH THE RESULTS?

• Write down the two readings each time, even if they seem too high or too low. If you take a third reading, you don’t have to write it down.
• Bring the completed chart with you each time that you visit your health professional.
• Show the chart to the health professional.

Here are some examples of the charts you will be using at home.
IMPORTANT

• For accurate home blood pressure monitoring, you must take several readings over seven consecutive days. An average of the readings taken on the last six days will provide a good estimate of your actual blood pressure measurement.

• If you measure your blood pressure when you feel stressed, the reading will not be an accurate reflection of your usual blood pressure. For instance, don’t take your pressure after receiving bad news - wait until later.

• You should measure your blood pressure at the same time every day. Choose a time in the morning and evening when you are most likely to remember. For instance, try associating your blood pressure measurement with another activity (e.g. before brushing your teeth or after going to the bathroom first thing in the morning).

• Write down the two readings each time, even if they seem too high or too low, and even if you are not happy with them. If you insist on taking a third reading, you don’t have to write it down.

• If you forget to measure your pressure a few times over the seven days, don’t worry. Just write an X on the chart corresponding to the times you forgot.

• Fill out the chart until the end of the selected time period. After the seventh day, put away your blood pressure monitor and give the chart to your doctor or nurse at your next appointment. Some health professionals may ask that you bring your device and the chart to your appointments.
Charting your results
Enter your results on the chart below (2 readings in the morning and 2 readings in the evening). If you miss one or more readings, write an X in the corresponding box.

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<th>D2</th>
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<th>D4</th>
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If you calculate your average, don’t use the measurements you took on Day 1
For more information on how to calculate your results, visit:
www.hypertension.qc.ca (tab: info public/mesures à domicile)

• You may photocopy this chart
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If you calculate your average, don’t use the measurements you took on Day 1.

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Questions and Answers - A Patient’s Guide to Controlling Hypertension, written by doctors, pharmacists and nurses, contains valuable information about high blood pressure, its diagnosis and treatment.

A second publication by the Quebec Hypertension Society, in partnership with Canadian Hypertension Society, My Nutrition Guide for the Prevention and the Treatment of High Blood Pressure was written by dieticians who specialize in hypertension, and contains practical advice on improving your blood pressure and your cardiovascular health.