



## What is Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)?

**H**ypertension is another name for high blood pressure. Blood pressure measures the pressure of blood on the walls of your blood vessels as your blood circulates through your body. When someone has high blood pressure over a long time, the body's blood vessels may get damaged.

### High Blood Pressure Among Inuit

High blood pressure rarely existed among Inuit in the past, but now we are seeing more and more Inuit with hypertension. Recent research studies of Inuit in Nunavik show that Inuit are eating less traditional food, and more processed foods and food high in salt. Researchers believe this is contributing to high blood pressure among Inuit.<sup>1</sup>

### What do the Numbers Mean to Me?

Your heart pressure changes when the heart contracts and relaxes. There is a number for each action. A healthy blood pressure for an adult Inuk man is a number lower than 139/89<sup>2</sup>. Anything over this will be of concern to you and your doctor. Often high blood pressure can lead to serious health problems such as:

- strokes;
- heart attacks;
- heart and kidney failure.

Some things that raise your blood pressure include too much salt or sodium in the diet, stress, lack of exercise, being overweight and having an unhealthy diet. These are risk factors you can change. Other risk factors that you cannot change are your age (blood pressure usually increases as you get older), and having a family history of hypertension.

### Controlling Blood Pressure

There are many ways you can help control your blood pressure:

- Be physically active for 30-40 minutes a day – things like playing sports, hunting or walking;
- Eat healthy foods like fruits and vegetables, foods lower in fat and salt, whole grains, lean meat such as caribou, musk ox or poultry;
- If you are overweight, losing 10 pounds will lower your blood pressure;
- Choose spices to cook with instead of salt;
- Stop smoking or smoke less if you cannot stop;
- Limit your alcohol to one drink a day.

You may not know if you have high blood pressure until you see your doctor. There are often no signs or symptoms. Some symptoms might include headaches, problems with your sight, dizziness or shortness of breath.

It is important to get your blood pressure checked regularly by your doctor if you are over 18.

— continues

1 The True North: Strong When Salt Free. October 2009. Available on the Canadian Cardiovascular Society Web site, [www.ccsa.ca/congress](http://www.ccsa.ca/congress)

2 Hypertension: 2008 public recommendations. Available on the Heart and Stroke Foundation Web site, [www.heartandstroke.com](http://www.heartandstroke.com)



# High blood pressure affects one in five Canadians... Yet 42% of Canadians with high blood pressure don't even know they have it because there are no symptoms<sup>3</sup>

## What to Do if You Have High Blood Pressure

Get your blood pressure checked regularly by a doctor or nurse. It is also important to get tests for your cholesterol, kidney function and blood sugar levels.

- Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that is made by the body and is found naturally in animal foods. Foods high in cholesterol include liver and organ meats, egg yolks, and dairy fats. Cholesterol is carried in the blood and when levels are too high, some of the cholesterol sticks to the walls of the blood vessels. Over time, this can build up in your blood vessels. This means your heart has to work harder because your blood doesn't flow as easily through your body.
- Kidneys filter the blood and remove waste products and extra water. If you have high blood pressure, your heart has to work

harder, which can damage the blood vessels in your body. If the blood vessels in your kidneys are damaged, they may stop

and other organs. Check your sugar levels and monitor them if you do have diabetes to help you prevent complications.



removing wastes and extra fluid from your body. The extra fluid may then raise blood pressure even more.

- If you have high sugar levels in your blood, you might be at risk for diabetes. This can lead to damage to your eyes, kidneys

Your health care provider will decide if you need to take medication to help you control your blood pressure. It is important to stay on your medication and take it as directed. Your body might take up to six weeks to respond to the medication and lower your blood pressure.

<sup>3</sup> High Blood Pressure. Available on the Heart and Stroke Foundation Web site, [www.heartandstroke.com](http://www.heartandstroke.com)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

You might also want to read *Inuit Men Talking About Health* to learn more about Inuit men's health issues. This report provides perspectives from Inuit men about their health and wellness, including physical activity, their use of health care, personal and family problems, education, and employment. Inuit Tuttarvingat published this report in 2008.

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[www.naho.ca/inuit/e/resources/](http://www.naho.ca/inuit/e/resources/)

## OTHER RESOURCES:

You can find more information about high blood pressure and heart health from:

**Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion**  
[www.healthyontario.com](http://www.healthyontario.com)

**Canadian Hypertension Society**  
[www.hypertension.ca/chs/](http://www.hypertension.ca/chs/)

**Heart and Stroke Foundation**  
[www.heartandstroke.com](http://www.heartandstroke.com)

