

Courtenay Pharmacy

2599B Cliffe Ave Courtenay BC V9N 2L5
Ph: 250 871-8405 Fax: 250 871 8409
BLOOD PRESSURE

WHY CHECK YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure is one indicator of a healthy heart and cardiovascular system.

Your health professional needs accurate data to make decisions to help you achieve your health goals. The collection of that data outside of visits to the doctor's office allows your doctor to make good decisions on what your medications need to be, and what doses of those medications should be used.

WHAT DO THE NUMBERS MEAN?

Your heart is a muscle that contracts and relaxes throughout the day, usually between 60 and 90 times per minute. Your blood pressure machine or your health professional will usually give you 3 numbers from the reading; the first (usually the highest) number is called the systolic pressure and is the pressure in the blood vessel when the heart is contracting and forcing blood through. The second number, the diastolic pressure, is the pressure in the vessel when the heart is at rest. If your machine or doctor gives you a third number that is usually the pulse, or the number of times the heart beats in a minute. The Canadian Heart and stroke foundation list high risk blood pressure as 140/90, and medium risk as 121-139/80-89.

WHAT CAUSES CHANGES IN BLOOD PRESSURE?

Anything that causes the heart to work harder increases the blood pressure. There are both positive and negative ways that your blood pressure can change.

Stress, anger, smoking, improper diet, caffeine, certain over the counter medications, illness are all negative stressors that will impact blood pressure.

Exercise, relaxation, laughing, meditation have positive effects on the blood pressure.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MY BLOOD PRESSURE?

Lifestyle modification is the biggest difference maker for most people.

1. Increase the amount and quality of exercise. Do this slowly and with the help of a trained fitness and or health professional if you have never exercised before.
2. Increase the quality of your nutrition. Consult a dietician or other health professional for help here. The internet will offer lots of advice, but moderate what you read with common sense. Stay away from heavily processed foods and whenever possible use pure whole foods.
3. Decrease stresses on the heart; weight, lifestyle stresses.
4. Assume a proactive role in your care. Understand what the treatments are and what you can do to either hinder them, or help them.
5. If your doctor feels you need medication, take it as prescribed. When you have questions about the medications, ask our pharmacist.
6. Monitor your blood pressure either at home, or when you are out. Preferably you should be doing it at home, consistently. Keep the results in a log, and take that log to your doctor's appointment. This will give them a broader range of information to base decisions on.
7. Maintain your blood pressure monitor and make sure it is consistent with your doctors results. At least once a year take your machine with you and compare it to your readings in the office. They will not be identical, but they should be close.

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HOW TO TAKE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

CHOOSE THE CORRECT CUFF AND MONITOR.

1. The cuff should fit. Measure the left arm and ensure that the measurement falls within the range for the cuff. An ill-fitting cuff will give errors and inaccurate readings.
2. You can get a manual or an automatic inflation monitor. Both are effective. The manual inflation meter requires more hand strength and technique. We usually recommend the automatic inflate meters for ease and consistency of operation.
3. Arm, wrist or fingertip monitors are available. The upper arm is the most reliable. The wrist meters are accurate, but require more technique to get reliable readings. The fingertip meters are not generally recommended. Our general advice is to use an upper arm meter.
4. Get a meter that is reliable from an endorsed manufacturer. The Canadian Heart and Stroke foundation has a check symbol for manufacturers that meet their quality standards. Omron and Life-Source meters both meet the recommendation standards of the Canadian Heart and stroke Foundation. We have chosen Omron meters for our practice.

WHEN TO TAKE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

1. Take your blood pressure at consistent times each day.
2. If you take blood pressure medications, ensure that you are taking your blood pressure before taking the medications that day. For most people this means taking blood pressure first thing in the morning.
3. Wait to take your blood pressure if you have exercised; 30 minutes after light exercise like walking or moderate cardio exercise, 2 hours after strenuous activities or exercise.
4. Wait for a while after a large meal, some sources suggest waiting up to 2 hours.
5. Try to wait at least 30 minutes after caffeine or smoking.

HOW TO TAKE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

1. Go to the bathroom before taking your blood pressure. A full bladder or bowel will affect the readings.
2. The upper arm should be clear. Either roll up your sleeve completely or remove obstructive clothing. If rolling up the sleeve causes the sleeve to become tight around the upper arm, remove your arm from the sleeve.
3. You should be sitting down when you take your blood pressure at home. It is recommended that you sit at a table where you can rest your arm comfortably. The upper part of the arm to be tested should be at approximately the level of the heart. You may have to add a cushion or pillow under the arm to achieve this.
4. Set the cuff in place as per the instructions from the manufacturer and your health care professional. Usually this involves making sure that the tube coming out of the cuff sits just on the inside of the upper arm, just above the elbow. The cuff should be snug, but not too tight. A good guideline is that with the cuff in place you should be able to slide two fingers between the cuff and your arm.
5. Sit comfortably, with your back straight, and resting against the back of a chair, arm resting on the table, and feet flat on the floor (do not cross the feet at the ankle or cross the legs).
6. Once seated and relaxed, wait about five minutes before starting your test. Press the button or quickly inflate the manual cuff and remain relaxed and breathing for the duration of the test.
7. Write down the test results, and remain in your relaxed position in preparation for the second reading. Wait at least one minute between readings and repeat the test. Write the result in the log book. Some sources suggest two readings, others suggest three. This gives a good average of how your blood pressure is at the time of the test.

