

## **HYPERTENSION**

### **What do you know about Hypertension?**

As a leading cause of health problems in Canada, it's fitting that hypertension is the first topic examined in our Heart Smart series. Wondering if you're at risk? Find answers to this and other frequently asked hypertension questions below:

### **What is hypertension?**

As your heart pumps, it moves blood around your body through arteries. The force of the blood pushing against the walls of these arteries is your “blood pressure”. Hypertension (commonly referred to as “high blood pressure”) occurs when the blood pushes against your artery walls with too much force.

### **What health risks does hypertension pose? Is it bad?**

Yes - high blood pressure (hypertension) can damage artery walls, causing strokes, heart attacks, kidney and heart failure, dementia and sexual problems.

### **Who is at risk?**

Although it's more common as a person ages, anyone can develop high blood pressure. In fact, 9 out of 10 Canadians will develop high blood pressure in their lifetime, and those who smoke, have a diet high in sodium (salt), are overweight and/or under-exercised are at even greater risk.

### **Common symptoms?**

Hypertension is called the “Silent Killer” because it has no warning signs or symptoms. Having your blood pressure checked regularly by a care provider is key to diagnosing and controlling the condition.

### **How can I reduce my risk of developing hypertension?**

A healthy lifestyle is your best protection against hypertension: Quit smoking. Maintain a healthy body weight. Have your blood pressure checked regularly. Be physically active. Eat a healthy, balanced diet (high in whole grains, low-fat dairy products, vegetables, fruits and lean meats). Lower your intake of sodium (salt), saturated and trans fats, and remember: fast, canned, and prepared foods tend to have particularly high levels of these unhealthy elements.

### ***Heart Health & Women : Do's & Don'ts***

#### ***DO: Manage controllable risk factors***

Some risk factors - obesity, physical activity, tobacco use/exposure, dietary fat & sodium, stress – are your responsibility. Your lifestyle choices will directly impact your risk for heart disease.

#### ***DON'T: Ignore the symptoms***

Women are less likely than men to have “typical” symptoms of chest discomfort when experiencing a heart attack. Additionally, many women deny the seriousness of their symptoms, making them less likely to receive proven life saving therapies.

If you experience the symptoms below, seek medical care immediately:

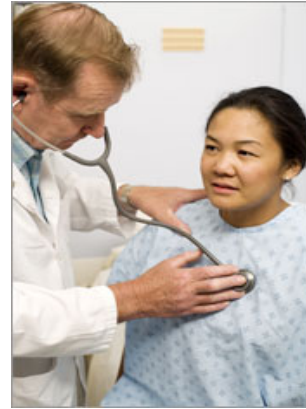
- Discomfort in chest, back, neck, shoulder, arms, jaw or teeth

- Squeezing, heaviness, tightness, pressure or burning pain
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Extreme weakness, exhaustion, dizziness

***DO: Have risk factors tested regularly***

Ensure your care provider frequently checks your:

- Blood Pressure
- Cholesterol
- Triglycerides
- Blood Sugar
- Weight
- Waist Circumference



***DON'T: Skip your Cardiac Rehab***

Family needs, a lack of support, feelings of discouragement... there are many barriers women face when it comes to participating in cardiac rehabilitation programs. Encouragement may be hard to find, but take heart in knowing that your chance of death and disability is hugely reduced when you participate.

Source: Heart Smart Series, E-Health Info, Calgary Health Region, Feb 2008.

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