Maintaining a Healthy Blood Pressure

High blood pressure – also known as hypertension – affects one in five Canadians. It is the number one risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart disease. High blood pressure is often called a "silent killer" because it has no warning signs or symptoms. You can't see it. You can't feel it. But the good news is that you can control it. If you know and control your blood pressure, you can cut your risk of stroke by up to 40% and heart attack by up to 25%.

What you can do to control your blood pressure:

1. Have your blood pressure checked regularly. As recommended by your healthcare provider or at least every 2 years.

2. If your doctor has prescribed medication, take it as directed.

3. Reduce the amount of sodium you eat. The Heart and Stroke Foundation recommends that Canadians eat less than

2,300 mg of sodium (about 1 tsp) a day total. For those with already high blood pressure, that number should shrink

to 1200-1500 mg. High sources of sodium are found in convenience and snack foods as well as smoked, salted, cured or canned meats and fish. Salt in cooking or at the table can also be a high source.

4. Eat a healthy, balanced, diet that is lower in fat (especially saturated and trans fats) based on Canada's Food Guide.

Consider the DASH eating plan (heartandstroke.com), which can help lower your high blood pressure.

5. Be physically active for at least 150 minutes per week doing moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical

activity, in bouts of 10 minutes or more. Speak to your healthcare provider before starting.

6. Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. If you are overweight, losing even 5% - 10% of your weight can help to

reduce your blood pressure as well as dramatically decrease your chances of having a stroke or heart attack.

7. Be smoke-free. If you smoke, speak to your doctor or healthcare provider about quitting. If you don't smoke, minimize exposure to secondhand smoke.

8. Limit alcohol intake to no more than one to two drinks a day, to a weekly maximum of 14 drinks for men and 9

9. Find healthy ways to manage your stress. Too much stress may increase your blood pressure. Healthy stress coping mechanisms include physical activity, socializing, laughter and healthy eating.

Adapted from the Heart & Stroke Foundation