

Learn how to control a silent killer

May 15, 2008 – Canadians can help control a silent killer by regularly monitoring their blood pressure and keeping it under control, says the Heart and Stroke Foundation (HSF).

“It is important that all Canadians know and control their blood pressure,” says Dr. Arun Chockalingam, secretary general of the World Hypertension League (WHL). “High blood pressure – known as the silent killer due to its lack of symptoms – is the number one risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart disease.”

The Foundation and 11 other health organizations in Canada and around the world are marking World Hypertension Day – an initiative of the World Hypertension League – on May 17. The theme of this international event is “Measure Your Blood Pressure...at Home!”

People who have been diagnosed with hypertension (high blood pressure) should be especially vigilant in monitoring their blood pressure. But just because you haven’t been diagnosed with high blood pressure does not mean you’re not at risk.

“Many of the five million Canadians with high blood pressure don’t know they have it,” says HSF spokesperson Dr. George Honos. “Men between the ages of 18 to 34 are the least likely to be aware of having high blood pressure.”

“When you measure your blood pressure at home it helps you and your doctor understand how well your blood pressure is controlled on a day-to-day basis,” says Dr. Chockalingam. “The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to measure...so measure at home in addition to periodic evaluation of blood pressure by a doctor or other health professional.”

Canadians should speak to their doctor about home blood pressure monitoring. Health care providers will give advice on what unit and cuff size is right for them and instruct on proper use of a home monitor. Self-measurement is easy and safe. The Canadian Hypertension Society has a list of recommended models on their website at hypertension.ca.

High blood pressure is linked to a number of other health conditions, including overweight and obesity, a growing health problem for Canadians.

Canadians can usually keep blood pressure within a normal range by making healthy choices and, if necessary, following doctor’s orders for medication. “People can often control high blood pressure by lifestyle changes,” says Dr. Honos. “Even if you don’t have high blood pressure, you can help prevent its onset by following a healthy diet.”

Canadians can keep their blood pressure under control by:

- Checking regularly with their health care providers. High blood pressure has no symptoms. Have your blood pressure checked at least every two years by a healthcare professional.

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- If you have high normal blood pressure (between 135/85-139/89 mmHg), Canadian guidelines recommend getting your blood pressure checked once a year.
- Making healthy food choices.
- Eating less salt and alcohol.
- Being physically active.
- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Being smoke-free.
- If your doctor has prescribed medication, taking it as directed.
- Monitoring blood pressure regularly while on medications.
- Reporting any side effects to health care providers.

With proper diagnosis and treatment of high blood pressure, you can cut your risk of stroke by up to 40 per cent and heart attack by up to 25 per cent.

“Don’t be a statistic,” says Dr. Chockalingam. “Mark World Hypertension Day on May 17 by making an appointment to get your blood pressure checked. If you do have high blood pressure, learn how to measure it at home and share the results with your doctor on a regular basis.”

For information on how to measure your blood pressure at home, visit heartandstroke.ca

World Hypertension Day will be launched on Parliament Hill on Thursday, May 15 by Steven Fletcher, MP and parliamentary secretary for health. This event will be hosted by Senator Wilbert Keon and include a blood pressure measurement clinic for dignitaries.

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World Hypertension Day is May 17. It has been established to highlight the serious medical complications of this condition and to communicate to the public information on prevention, detection, and treatment. For more information, visit worldhypertensionleague.org.

The World Hypertension League (WHL) is a federation of leagues, societies, and other national bodies devoted to promote the detection, control, and prevention of arterial hypertension. The WHL member organizations promote the exchange of information and offer internationally applicable methods and programs for hypertension control. Its goal is to bring together and stimulate organizations committed to the control of hypertension. The WHL is a division of the International Society of Hypertension (ISH), and is in official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO).

Heart and Stroke Foundation

The Heart and Stroke Foundation (heartandstroke.ca), a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy.

The Heart&Stroke Blood Pressure Action Plan™ offers realistic strategies and on-going support to help individuals prevent and control high blood pressure. Canadians can get a free, confidential risk assessment and action plan by going to heartandstroke.ca/bp.

For information on the Foundation's Health Check™ food information program, with over 1,000 products, see healthcheck.org.

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