

A Healthy Blood Pressure

February is here! This is a time for sharing sweet messages of love, from the heart. It's also the time of year when we focus on the health of our heart, which may be the most loving thing we can do for ourselves and those who care about us. This focus is very important considering heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, and the second leading cause of death in Canada, for both men and women. It's been the number one killer of adults since the mid-twentieth century.

Heart disease is a term that encompasses several specific diseases that affect the cardiovascular system. These diseases include:

- **Coronary Artery Disease** - caused by a buildup of fatty deposits or plaque on the arterial walls, constricting blood flow to the heart.
- **Stroke** - the second most common cause of cardiovascular disease. Strokes can occur when a blood clot blocks a blood vessel.
- **Heart Failure or Congestive Heart Failure** - occurs when the heart muscle has become weak and unable to effectively send oxygenated blood throughout the cardiovascular system.
- **High Blood Pressure, Arrhythmias, and Atrial Fibrillation (AFib)** - contribute to increased risk as they relate to cardiovascular disease.

High blood pressure or hypertension is known as the silent killer. That's because it has little to no obvious symptoms. The only way to be certain a problem exists, is to monitor blood pressure regularly with a sphygmomanometer. This can be done at home or in a physician's office.

According to the American Heart Association, a consistent blood pressure reading of 130-139 on the systolic (upper number) and/or 80-89 on the diastolic (lower number) represents hypertension stage 1. This is the level where your doctor will likely prescribe medication to lower your blood pressure and may also make recommendations on basic lifestyle changes. Readings of 120/80 and below are considered normal.

The good news is that cardiovascular disease is preventable in most cases. It's been said that if a person survives a heart attack, they're likely to live a good long life afterwards. Experiencing the trauma of a heart attack is usually alarming enough to get one's attention and cause them to be ready to make healthful lifestyle changes.

The lifestyle that supports a healthy blood pressure and cardiovascular system includes aerobic exercise. Walking is one of the best aerobic exercises. It helps to lower blood pressure and resting heart rate. Regular exercise promotes quality sleep, which improves overall health and reduces stress.

Proper hydration keeps blood at an optimal consistency, so it travels more smoothly throughout the body. Nutritionally dense foods fortify and strengthen all tissues and organs of the body so that they work together synergistically. And avoiding tobacco products is key to a healthful lifestyle.

Use this month to pay particular attention to your heart health and take proactive steps to manage a healthy blood pressure in 2023!

