

## **BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) EDUCATION**

### **WHAT IS HYPERTENSION?**

Hypertension is a term that is used to describe high blood pressure. Blood pressure refers to pressure that is applied on the walls of the blood vessels in our body.

Blood pressure is usually expressed in terms of systolic pressure (pressure when your heart is contracting) over diastolic pressure (pressure when your heart is relaxed). Blood pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg).

Diagnosis of hypertension occurs if the systolic pressure is at or over 140 mmHg and diastolic pressure is at or over 90 mmHg (also expressed as “140 over 90”).

### **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?**

High blood pressure does not typically cause noticeable symptoms. It is considered a “silent killer.” However, when symptoms do emerge, it can be very serious. Some symptoms to look out for include severe headache, fatigue or confusion, vision issues, chest pain, breathing difficulties, pounding in your chest, neck, or ears, nosebleeds, blood in urine, nervousness or facial flushing.

### **WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?**

Uncontrolled high blood pressure puts you at risk for a heart attack, stroke and death. Heart attacks and strokes occur as a result of damaged blood vessels becoming blocked and preventing blood flow to the heart or brain. High blood pressure may also cause a stroke due to bleeding in the brain. Other complications of high blood pressure include an enlarged heart, heart failure, kidney disease, vision loss, and sexual dysfunction.

### **WHAT ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS?**

A long-term commitment to lifestyle changes and medication are required to treat hypertension. Blood pressure lowering medications, physical activity, and dietary modifications, including a low fat diet and reduced salt intake, are important in the management of hypertension.