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In Spite of Regular Blood Pressure Tests, Only 56% Know Their Blood Pressure

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Toronto, ONTARIO – The results of a new survey conducted by Ipsos-Reid for the Canadian Coalition for High Blood Pressure Prevention and Control, supported by Pfizer Canada Inc., suggest that mid- to older-aged Canadians have a lot to learn when it comes to avoiding hypertension.

The survey examined the level of understanding about hypertension among those Canadians whose age alone puts them at a higher risk of developing the condition – for women it is aged 40 and older, and for men aged 50 and older.

The findings indicate that – across both gender/age groups combined - four in ten (42%) have never discussed the condition with their physician, yet 42% of men aged 50 and older, and 35% of women aged 40 and older rate themselves as being somewhat or very likely to develop high blood pressure. The survey also finds that, while they may be checking their blood pressure on a regular basis, about half of Canadians do not know their current blood pressure reading, and most don't even know what a healthy or normal blood pressure reading is.

The survey also highlights some key misunderstandings about the condition: about two thirds (63%) of respondents claim to know how to recognize the symptoms of this largely



asymptomatic condition. Respondents are also engaging in some risky behaviours – in spite of their understanding that things like being overweight, smoking and insufficient exercise may put them at risk for developing high blood pressure.

These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid poll conducted between July 14th and 24th, 2003. The research was commissioned by the Canadian Coalition for High Blood Pressure Prevention and Control, and supported by Pfizer Canada Inc. The results are based on a randomly selected sample of 500 Canadian men aged 50 and older and 501 Canadian women aged 40 and older. With a sample size of 500/501, the results are considered accurate to within ± 4.4 percentage points (19 times out of 20) of what they would have been had the entire target population been polled, and with a combined sample size of 1001, the margin of error is ± 3.1 percentage points. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual adult population according to the 2001 Census data.

42% of Mid- to Older-Aged Canadians Have Never Discussed High Blood Pressure With Their Physician

In spite of the fact that their age alone puts them in at a higher risk for developing hypertension, 42% of survey respondents have never discussed the condition with their physician.

Among those who *have* had a discussion with their physician, most (56%) say their doctor initiated the conversation, but many (42%) report having initiated the discussion themselves.

Four In Ten Rate Themselves “Somewhat” or “Very” Likely to Develop High Blood Pressure

Among those who are not currently hypertensive, 42% of men and 35% of women rate themselves “somewhat” or “very” likely to develop it.



- ◆ Most likely to perceive themselves as likely to develop high blood pressure are those who have been diagnosed previously (55%).
- ◆ Respondents aged 65 and older are least likely to feel they will develop high blood pressure (27%).

One-Third (30%) Have Blood Pressure Checked Annually – Usually At The Doctor’s Office

Overall, 30% of respondents report having their blood pressure checked every year.

However, six in ten indicate having a reading done even more frequently: 18% say every six months, 21% say every three months, and 20% say every month. Most of those having more frequent readings have been diagnosed with high blood pressure.

About one in ten have their blood pressure checked less than once a year.

Most have their readings done at the doctor’s office (71%), but some measure theirs at home (10%), at the pharmacy (10%), or at a hospital (4%).

Only Half Can Provide A Correct Blood Pressure Reading

In spite of the frequency with which they report checking their blood pressure, only 56% could provide a correctly formatted (ie. [number] over [number]) reading when asked for their latest blood pressure reading. Another five percent gave a response that was not in the standard format, but more than one third (36%) were unable to report their latest blood pressure reading.



Most Middle-Aged Canadians Do Not Know What A Normal Or Healthy Blood Pressure Reading Is

Only 26% were able to cite 120 over 80 as a healthy or normal blood pressure reading. Another 15% gave responses with a diastolic value between 120 and 140 and a systolic reading of between 60 and 90.

One third (32%) gave responses that were incorrect. In most cases, incorrect responses were either missing one of the diastolic or systolic values. In a few cases responses were in the form of a mathematical equation based on age or other rather generalized responses.

The remaining 25% said they just don't know what a normal or healthy blood pressure reading is.

Many Take A Fairly Relaxed Approach Toward High Blood Pressure

Almost half (43%) of respondents report that they have more important things to worry about than their blood pressure. Furthermore, 33% said they really hadn't given their blood pressure much thought before responding to this survey.

More than one-third (38%) of survey respondents are confident that they can control their blood pressure on their own – without having to seek advice from a doctor (men are especially confident at 43%).

Perhaps this casual confidence comes in part from the belief that having high blood pressure means you have to watch what you eat (28% agree) or reduce your level of activity (13% agree), but other than that, it's no big deal. About one in six (17%) feel that only people who can't handle their stress have to worry about high blood pressure.



And Many May Be Putting Themselves At Risk For Hypertension Without Even Realizing It

While most survey respondents recognize and avoid some of the more common risky behaviours associated with high blood pressure, results show there is room for improvement:

- ◆ More than nine in ten (93%) believe that having a stressful daily life may place a person at greater risk for developing high blood pressure – 41% consider their own lives stressful.
- ◆ 93% believe being overweight is a risk factor, and yet almost half (44%) report that they consider themselves to be overweight.
- ◆ 88% say a family history of high blood pressure is a risk factor. One third (35%) report a history of high blood pressure in their own family.
- ◆ 87% understand that a diet that is high in sugar and fats might place them at greater risk for developing high blood pressure, and 14% reporting having just such a diet.
- ◆ 85% believe not getting at least 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week might put a person at risk, but 27% do not get enough exercise.
- ◆ 83% believe a high sodium diet is a risky behaviour. One in ten (12%) indicate having a diet that is high in salt.
- ◆ 81% recognize smoking as a high-risk activity when it comes to developing hypertension, but 18% light up anyway.



- ◆ Only just over half (54%) understand that consuming 2 or more alcoholic drinks per day might put someone at risk. Ten percent report drinking at least 2 or more such drinks on a daily basis.

Heart Disease and Stroke More of a Concern Than Hypertension

A majority of survey respondents (54%) are either very or somewhat concerned about high blood pressure or hypertension when it comes to their own personal health, but greater levels of concern are reported for heart disease (65%) and stroke (60%).

At 69%, cancer garnered the highest level of concern among the specific conditions included in this research (the others were: lower back pain – 57%, high cholesterol – 55% and diabetes – 49%).

- ◆ Women are more concerned than men about cancer (73% versus 64%), stroke (65% versus 54%), and lower back pain (62% versus 52%).

63% Say They Know How To Recognize Symptoms of High Blood Pressure

In spite of the fact that hypertension is frequently without any recognizable symptoms, 63% of survey respondents say they know how to recognize its symptoms. Only 19% realize that high blood pressure does not have any recognizable symptoms. In fact, when read a specific list of possible symptoms, survey respondents link many of them to this “silent disease”.

More than eight in ten (85%) believe that dizziness or light-headedness is a symptom of hypertension. Slightly fewer (78%) cite headaches as a symptom. About two-thirds believe that fatigue (67%), numbness in arms or legs (65%), or shortness of breath (62%) are symptoms. One in four think that dry mouth or excessive thirst (27%) or heartburn (25%) are symptoms of high blood pressure.

It is interesting to note that these results do not differ among those who have had a discussion with their physician about high blood pressure, or even among those who have been diagnosed with the condition.

Not Everyone Is So Casual About High Blood Pressure

Nine in ten (89%) of middle-aged Canadians agree that they are responsible for controlling their blood pressure. Eight in ten (82%) report that health issues like high blood pressure are becoming more of a concern to them as they grow older.

Notably, in spite of this feeling of responsibility for their blood pressure, 74% of respondents suspect that there is a lot they don't know about the condition.

Many Recognize Stroke (63%) and Heart Attacks (44%) as Possible Consequences of Uncontrolled Hypertension

Sixteen percent of respondents say they don't really consider high blood pressure to be a serious medical condition, yet many are able to correctly identify the very serious possible consequences of not treating high blood pressure.

On an unaided and open-ended basis, 63% of respondents cite stroke as a possible implication of high blood pressure left untreated. Another 44% suggest heart attack as a possible outcome. Much smaller proportions name death (26%) and heart disease (20%) as health implications. Other responses include damaged blood vessels/arteries (5%) and paralysis (4%).

Respondents Estimate at Least 4 in 10 in Their Age Group Suffer From High Blood Pressure

Canadian men aged 50 and older estimate that 44% of their age/gender group suffer from high blood pressure. Responses ranged from under 10% to more than 70%. Canadian women aged 40 and older gave a similarly wide range of responses when asked the same



question about their age/gender peers. On average, the women estimated that 50% of Canadian women aged 40 and older suffer from high blood pressure.

- ◆ Among both men and women, respondents aged 65 or older gave the highest estimate of hypertension prevalence (51% among men 65+, 56% among women 65+).

One-Third of Survey Respondents Have Been Diagnosed With High Blood Pressure

Thirty-two percent of male respondents and 36% of female respondents indicate that they have, at some point, been diagnosed by a physician as suffering from high blood pressure. Among those diagnosed, 50% of men and 71% of women report that they currently still suffer from high blood pressure.

Diagnosed Hypertension Sufferers Getting Advice From Physicians – And They Are Taking Their Medication As Directed

Among those ever diagnosed with hypertension, almost nine in ten (87%) report that their physician told them their actual blood pressure reading when they were diagnosed. Three quarters (75%) say their physician recommended a healthier blood pressure goal to work toward, and the same proportion say they were prescribed a medication. Just over two-thirds (68%) report their physician recommended changes to their lifestyle such as diet and exercise to help control their blood pressure.

Among those who were prescribed a medication, 99% had the prescription filled and report that they took the medication as directed by their physician. Most (64%) are still taking the same medication, while 28% have switched to another one. Seven percent have stopped taking medication altogether – usually at their doctor’s suggestion.



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