What is Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure is also known as hypertension. Blood pressure (BP) is the pressure of the blood against your blood vessel walls. Your BP goes up and down throughout the day, but if it is up for a long time, it can cause serious health problems.

When measuring your own BP, make sure you know what to do if it is too high or if you don’t feel well. Know when to seek emergency treatment. Make a plan with your provider or nurse before you begin home blood pressure monitoring.

Why is Normal Blood Pressure Important?

High blood pressure increases your risk for dangerous health conditions:

- **First heart attack**: About 7 of every 10 people having their first heart attack have high blood pressure.
- **First stroke**: About 8 of every 10 people having their first stroke have high blood pressure.
- **Chronic (long lasting) heart failure**: About 7 of every 10 people with chronic heart failure have high blood pressure.

Although you cannot control all risk factors for high blood pressure, you can take steps to **prevent** or **control** high blood pressure and its complications.

Choosing a Home Blood Pressure Monitoring Device

- Upper arm blood pressure monitors are most accurate.
- Some blood pressure monitors take measurements from your wrist and finger. These are less accurate. These are not recommended.
- Some monitors have larger displays. These are easier to read.
- Some monitors can connect with your smartphone. These can track your blood pressure readings.
- Always purchase a monitor that has the correct size cuff for your arm.

Additional Resources


Exercise: cdc.gov/physicalactivity/index.html

Weight control: cdc.gov/healthyweight/index.html

Limiting alcohol use: cdc.gov/alcohol

Quitting smoking: cdc.gov/tobacco

Electronic recording blood pressure measurements: https://www.ccctracker.com/aha

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# Blood Pressure Numbers

## What Do They Mean?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blood Pressure Category</th>
<th>Systolic mm Hg (upper #)</th>
<th>Diastolic mm Hg (lower #)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>less than 120</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevated</td>
<td>120 – 129</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1</td>
<td>130 – 139</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2</td>
<td>140 or higher</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertensive Crisis (Emergency care needed)</td>
<td>Higher than 180</td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Addressing High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1

- Adopt key lifestyle changes to bring your BP down to a healthier range
- Practice these lifestyle changes by building new, healthier habits
- Take a medication if one is prescribed for you
- Common first medication is a thiazide or ‘water pill’/diuretic
- Recheck with provider in 3 months or as you are prescribed

## Addressing High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2

- Focus efforts toward lifestyle changes to bring BP down to a healthier range
- Build new habits and consider working with a coach or the American Heart’s ccctracker.com/aha
- Take medications that are prescribed to lower your BP
- Recheck with provider in 2 weeks or as you are prescribed

## Lifestyle Changes that can Reduce Blood Pressure

- **Reduce weight:** 5-20 mmHg
- **Physical activity:** 4-9 mmHg
- **Adopt DASH Eating Plan:** 8-14 mmHg
- **Moderation of Alcohol Consumption:** 2-4 mmHg
- **Lower Sodium Intake:** 2-8 mmHg
- **Quit Smoking:** 2-4 mmHg

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**SOURCE:** AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION, INC.