

Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of arteries. Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers — the systolic pressure (as the heart beats) over the diastolic pressure (as the heart relaxes between beats).

Measuring Blood Pressure

Having one's blood pressure tested is quick and easy. A medical provider uses a device called a sphygmomanometer that has a cuff that wraps around the upper arm. An attached pump inflates the cuff to stop the blood flow in the artery for a few seconds and then a valve allows blood to flow freely again. A dial or column of mercury shows the pressure reading.

Before having blood pressure tested:

- Do not drink coffee or smoke cigarettes 30 minutes before having your blood pressure measured.
- Go to the bathroom prior to the reading. A full bladder can change a blood pressure reading.
- Sit for five minutes with the back supported and feet flat on the ground. Rest arms on a table at the level of the heart.
- Wear short sleeves so the upper arm is exposed.
- Ask the medical provider for the blood pressure reading in numbers.

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (also referred to as HBP or hypertension) is when your blood pressure is consistently too high. According to the American Heart Association, nearly half of American adults have high blood pressure and many are not even know aware of it.

For most adults, normal blood pressure is less than 120 over 80 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). Your blood pressure is considered high when you have consistent systolic readings of 130 mm Hg or higher or diastolic readings of 80 mm Hg or higher.

The higher your blood pressure levels, the more risk you have for other health problems, such as heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

Many people with high blood pressure can lower their blood pressure to a healthy range or keep their numbers in a healthy range by making lifestyle changes.

Some of these lifestyle changes include:

- Getting at least 150 minutes of physical activity each week (about 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week)
- Not smoking

- Eating a healthy diet, including limiting sodium (salt) and alcohol
- Keeping a healthy weight
- Managing stress

In addition to making positive lifestyle changes, some people with high blood pressure need to take medicine to manage their blood pressure

Talk with your healthcare team if you think you have high blood pressure or if you have been told you have high blood pressure but do not have it under control.

Low Blood Pressure

Low blood pressure occurs when blood flows through your blood vessels at lower than normal pressures. The medical term for low blood pressure is hypotension.

For most adults, normal blood pressure is usually less than 120/80 mm Hg. Low blood pressure is blood pressure that is lower than 90/60 mm Hg.

Some people have low blood pressure all the time, and it is normal for them. Other people experience a sudden drop in blood pressure or have low blood pressure that may be linked to a health problem. This can be dangerous, as it could mean your heart, brain, or other vital organs are not getting enough blood flow and you are at risk for a heart attack or stroke.

For many people, low blood pressure goes unnoticed. Others may feel symptoms such as:

- Confusion
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Fainting
- Feeling tired or weak
- Blurry vision
- Headache
- Neck or back pain
- Nausea
- Heart palpitations, or feel that your heart is skipping a beat, fluttering, or beating too hard or too fast

Depending on your symptoms, treatment may include drinking more fluids to prevent dehydration, taking medicines to raise your blood pressure, or adjusting medicines that cause low blood pressure.

Your doctor may talk to you about lifestyle changes, including changing what and how you eat and how you sit and stand up. Your doctor may also recommend compression stockings if you stand for long periods.

Resources

- American Heart Association: www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/index.htm
- National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute: www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Here when you need us.

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