

Blood Pressure Screening – Check it Out! (every 2 years)

(adapted from National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute - www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

High blood pressure (HBP) is a serious condition that can lead to heart disease, heart failure, stroke, kidney failure, and other health problems. "Blood pressure" is the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps out blood. If this pressure rises and stays high over time, it can damage the body in many ways. **HBP itself usually has no symptoms**; rarely, headaches may occur.

Blood pressure tends to rise with age. If you're a male older than 45 or a female older than 55, your risk for HBP is higher. Over half of all Americans aged 60 and older have HBP.

Isolated systolic hypertension (ISH) is the most common form of HBP in older adults. ISH occurs when only systolic blood pressure (the top number) is high. About 2 out of 3 people over age 60 who have HBP have ISH.

HBP doesn't have to be a routine part of aging. You can take steps to keep your blood pressure at a normal level.

Overview

About 1 in 3 adults in the United States has HBP. HBP itself usually has no symptoms. You can have it for years without knowing it. During this time, though, it can damage the heart, blood vessels, kidneys, and other parts of your body. This is why knowing your blood pressure numbers is important, even when you're feeling fine. If your blood pressure is normal, you can work with your health care team to keep it that way. If your blood pressure is too high, you need treatment to prevent damage to your body's organs.

Blood Pressure Numbers

Blood pressure numbers include systolic (sis-TOL-ik) and diastolic (di-a-STOL-ik) pressures. Systolic blood pressure is the pressure when the heart beats while pumping blood. Diastolic blood pressure is the pressure when the heart is at rest between beats.

Blood pressure numbers are written with the systolic number above or before the diastolic, such as 120/80 mmHg. (The mmHg is millimeters of mercury—the units used to measure blood pressure.)

The table below shows normal numbers for adults. It also shows which numbers put you at greater risk for health problems. Blood pressure tends to go up and down, even in people who have normal blood pressure. If your numbers stay above normal most of the time, you're at risk.

Categories for Blood Pressure Levels in Adults (in mmHg, or millimeters of mercury)

Category	Systolic (top number)		Diastolic (bottom number)
Normal	Less than 120	And	Less than 80
Prehypertension	120–139	Or	80–89
High blood pressure			
Stage 1	140–159	Or	90–99
Stage 2	160 or higher	Or	100 or higher

The ranges in the table apply to most adults (aged 18 and older) who don't have short-term serious illnesses. If you have diabetes or chronic kidney disease, HBP is defined as 130/80 mmHg or higher. All levels above 120/80 mmHg raise your risk, and the risk grows as blood pressure levels rise. "Prehypertension" means you're likely to end up with HBP, unless you take steps to prevent it.

If you're being treated for HBP and have repeat readings in the normal range, your blood pressure is under control. However, you still have the condition. You should see your doctor and stay on treatment to keep your blood pressure under control.

Your systolic and diastolic numbers may not be in the same blood pressure category. In this case, the more severe category is the one you're in. For example, if your systolic number is 160 and your diastolic number is 80, you have stage 2 HBP. If your systolic number is 120 and your diastolic number is 95, you have stage 1 HBP.

How Is High Blood Pressure Diagnosed?

Your doctor will diagnose high blood pressure (HBP) using the results of blood pressure tests. These tests will be done several times to make sure the results are correct. If your numbers are high, your doctor may have you return for more tests to check your blood pressure over time.

If your blood pressure is 140/90 mmHg or higher over time, your doctor will likely diagnose you with HBP. If you have diabetes or chronic kidney disease, a blood pressure of 130/80 mmHg or higher is considered HBP.

How Is Blood Pressure Tested?

A blood pressure test is easy and painless. This test is done at a doctor's office or clinic.

To prepare for the test:

- Don't drink coffee or smoke cigarettes for 30 minutes prior to the test. These actions may cause a short-term rise in your blood pressure.
- Go to the bathroom before the test. Having a full bladder can change your blood pressure reading.
- Sit for 5 minutes before the test. Movement can cause short-term rises in blood pressure.

To measure your blood pressure, your doctor or nurse will use some type of a gauge, a stethoscope (or electronic sensor), and a blood pressure cuff. Most often, you will sit or lie down with the cuff around your arm as your doctor or nurse checks your blood pressure. If he or she doesn't tell you what your blood pressure numbers are, you should ask.

If You Have Normal Blood Pressure

If you don't have high blood pressure (HBP), you can take steps to prevent it. Lifestyle measures can help you maintain normal blood pressure.

- Follow a healthy eating plan. This includes limiting the amount of sodium (salt) and alcohol that you consume. An example of a healthy eating plan is the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH).
- Lose weight if you're overweight or obese.
- Do enough physical activity.
- Quit smoking.
- Manage your stress and learn to cope with stress

Many people who take one or more of these steps are able to prevent or delay HBP. The more steps you take, the more likely you are to lower your blood pressure and avoid related health problems.

If You Have High Blood Pressure

If you have HBP, you can still take steps to prevent the long-term problems it can cause. Lifestyle measures (listed above) and medicines can help you live a longer, more active life.

Follow the treatment plan your doctor prescribes to control your blood pressure. It can help you prevent or delay coronary heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and other health problems.



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