

What Is an Anormal Blood Pressure?

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One of the most dangerous cardiovascular diseases is hypertension, or high blood pressure. It is called one of the silent killers because many people have hypertension for years without being aware they have it. According to the American Heart Association, over 73 million adults over the age of 20 have high blood pressure. While the cause of high blood pressure isn't known, it is easily detected and treated during a visit to your doctor's office.

How Blood Circulates Through the Body

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood exerted against the inside of the arterial walls as it circulates through the body. Originating from the left ventricle of the heart, blood is squeezed through the arteries, where it supplies oxygen and nutrients to the rest of the body. The blood returns to the heart via the veins, gets re-oxygenated by the lungs and returns to the heart to begin the cycle again.

The Two Parts of Blood Pressure

When discussing blood pressure, there are two important values: the systolic and diastolic blood pressures. Contrary to popular belief, both blood pressures are important and represent different things to different people.

When the heart forces blood out of the left ventricle, the systolic blood pressure exerts pressure against the inside of the arterial walls. Stated in terms of millimeters of mercury, or mmHg, a normal systolic blood pressure is generally accepted as anything less than 120 mmHg. When the heart relaxes between beats, the stored energy in the arterial walls exerts pressure against the blood in the arteries. This is the [diastolic blood pressure](#). The generally accepted diastolic blood pressure should be less than 80 mmHg.

New, Revised Numbers for Blood Pressure

Recently, the the U.S. Department of [Health](#) and Human Services has recognized an increased risk for hypertension and developing stroke or heart attack. As a result, blood pressures have been identified as normal, prehypertensive and high blood pressure.

Normal blood pressure is a systolic blood pressure less than 120 mmHg and a diastolic blood pressure less than 80 mmHg.

Prehypertension is a systolic blood pressure between 120-139 mmHg and a diastolic blood pressure between 80-89.

High blood pressure is a systolic blood pressure of 140 mmHg or more and a diastolic blood pressure of 90 or more.

Unpreventable Causes of High Blood Pressure

There are a number of causes of blood pressure. Some you can change, and some you can't. For instance, those with other [family](#) members with hypertension are at a much greater risk of contracting it themselves.

Race is another unpreventable risk factor for high blood pressure. African and Native American males are at a higher risk for high blood pressure than their Caucasian counterparts.

Blood pressure also increases with age. Both men and women over the age of 55 have significantly higher chances of contracting high blood pressure.

Before the age of 55, men are at greater risk for contracting hypertension than women. After age 55, women increase their risk due to the effects of menopause.

How You Can Control Your Blood Pressure

While you may not be able to control your family history, race, age or gender, there are a number of things you can do to lower your risk for high blood pressure.

One of the easiest ways to manage your blood pressure is by managing your weight. There is a direct correlation between obesity and high blood pressure. Some easy ways to reduce your weight include exercising for at least 20 minutes a day, eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables whole grains and low-fat dairy products. Another easy way to reduce your caloric intake is to limit the amount of alcohol.

Quitting smoking is the single-most important way to manage high blood pressure and lower your risk for heart attack and stroke.

Finally, if you live a high stress lifestyle or are a Type A personality, explore ways to limit the amount of stress in your diet. Getting a good night's sleep and learning to meditate are two easy ways to manage your stress.