

Understanding Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels. Every heart beat creates a pressure that pushes oxygenated blood throughout the whole body as a result of two forces:

1. **Systolic blood pressure**-the pressure the blood is exerting when it pumps out of the heart and onto artery walls each time the heart beats.
2. **Diastolic blood pressure**- the pressure the blood is exerting on your artery walls while the heart is resting between heart beats

Check blood pressure regularly

It is important to check blood pressure regularly because a high blood pressure forces the heart and blood vessels to work harder, therefore less effectively.

Reading the numbers

Your blood pressure is recorded as two numbers:

- **Systolic blood pressure** (the upper number)
- **Diastolic blood pressure** (the lower number)

Blood Pressure is measured in mm Hg, meaning millimeters of mercury. Mercury is the standard unit of measurement for pressure in medicine and was used in the first accurate pressure gauges.

Blood pressure categories

Systolic and diastolic numbers categorize the blood pressure range in which you fall, which can lead to a diagnosis of high blood pressure.

The five blood pressure ranges as recognized by the American Heart Association are:

- **Normal blood pressure**
Blood pressure numbers that within the range of less than 120/80 mm Hg.
- **Prehypertension (early stage high blood pressure)**
Prehypertension is when blood pressure is consistently ranging from 120-139/80-89 mm Hg. People with prehypertension are likely to develop high blood pressure unless steps are taken to control it.
- **Hypertension Stage 1**
Hypertension Stage 1 is when blood pressure is consistently ranging from 140-159/90-99 mm Hg. At this stage of high blood pressure, doctors are likely to prescribe lifestyle changes and may consider adding blood pressure medication.

- **Hypertension Stage 2**

Hypertension Stage 2 is when blood pressure is consistently ranging at levels greater than 160/100 mm Hg. At this stage of high blood pressure, doctors are likely to prescribe a combination of blood pressure medications along with lifestyle changes.

- **Hypertensive crisis**

This is when high blood pressure requires emergency medical attention. If your blood pressure is higher than 180/110 mm Hg and you are NOT experiencing symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, back pain, numbness/weakness, changes in vision or difficulty speaking, wait about five minutes and take it again. If the reading is still at or above that level, get to the nearest ER.

If you get a high blood pressure reading

- A single reading slightly or moderately higher than normal is not an immediate cause for alarm. Take your blood pressure a few more times and consult your doctor to see if there is a health concern.
- If your blood pressure reading suddenly or unexpectedly reaches 180/110 mm Hg or higher, wait five minutes and test again. If your blood pressure remains this high after a few more tests, call 9-1-1. This is considered a hypertensive crisis requiring emergency medical attention.

High blood pressure, “the silent killer”

You may feel completely normal, but high blood pressure causes a vicious cycle that harms your heart, arteries and the rest of your body, potentially leading to heart attack and stroke. The best prevention of high blood pressure is knowing your numbers and consulting with your doctor to develop a healthy lifestyle plan to prevent and manage high blood pressure.



Cardiology
5003 Hardy Street
Hattiesburg
(601) 261-5700