

What is Normal Blood Pressure?

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It is estimated that there are over 50 million people with high blood pressure, or hypertension, in the United States and approximately 1 billion worldwide.

Unfortunately, the cause of the most common type of hypertension, called primary or essential hypertension, is unknown; although genetics, lifestyle and diet are suspected. Hypertension can lead to a number of serious health concerns, including stroke, renal disease, heart attack, heart failure, heart pain (angina), eye disease (retinopathy) and many others.

Your blood pressure should be measured every time you visit your physician or licensed health care provider. Your physician will place a blood pressure cuff, known as a sphygmomanometer, around your arm, inflate the cuff and listen to your heart with a stethoscope. You may feel a slightly uncomfortable squeeze as the cuff is inflated. Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm of Hg). The first number corresponds to the systolic blood pressure (pressure during contraction of the heart) and the second number is the diastolic blood pressure (pressure during relaxation of the heart). For example, if your blood pressure was 130 over 85 (130/85 mm of Hg), your systolic blood pressure would be 130 and your diastolic pressure would be 85.

Based on clinical studies, the values that were once considered normal for systolic and diastolic blood pressure, 130/85, are too high.

In May 2003, the seventh report of the Joint National Committee (JNC) on the Prevention, Detection, Evaluation and Treatment of High Blood Pressure was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The purpose of the JNC is to evaluate clinical studies and, based on these, to issue guidelines for the prevention, detection, evaluation and treatment of high blood pressure. The JNC concluded that the risk of cardiovascular disease begins at a blood pressure above 115/75 mm of Hg, and not at 130/85 mm of Hg, as originally thought. The new classification of blood pressure for adults 18 years and older are as follows:

Blood Pressure	Systolic	Diastolic	Lifestyle Changes	Drug Therapy
Optimal	115	75	Not required	Not required
Normal	120	80	Encouraged	Not required
Pre-hypertension	120-139	80-89	Yes	Not required
Stage 1 hypertension	140-159	90-99	Yes	Yes
Stage 2 hypertension	160 or above	100 or above	Yes	Yes

The JNC also established the proper procedure for taking an accurate blood pressure measurement. Please make sure your physician or licensed health care professional follows the steps below when taking your blood pressure.

1. The patient should be seated comfortably in a chair, not on the examining table, with their feet flat on the floor and their arm supported at heart level.
2. The patient should be seated for at least five minutes.
3. The appropriate blood pressure cuff size should be used (cuff must encircle at least 80% of the arm).
4. At least two measurements should be taken.
5. The blood pressure recorded is an average of the two measurements.

The JNC recommended a number of lifestyle modifications to effectively manage hypertension. These recommendations included weight loss, dietary sodium restriction, exercise, moderate alcohol consumption and a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and lowfat dairy products with reduced saturated and total fat. It is never too early to implement healthy lifestyle habits, nor is it ever too late to change bad ones.

