

THE HEART AND BLOOD PRESSURE



The heart is a powerful organ that pumps blood and nutrients through the body with the help of blood vessels. Oxygen is picked up in the lungs and pumped to all organs and tissues. Blood then enters the heart and flows to the lungs to regain oxygen and get rid of carbon dioxide and waste. It flows back to the heart, which pumps the refreshed blood to nourish the body again the cycle repeats nonstop.

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the artery walls.

A blood pressure reading has two measurements:

- **Systolic blood pressure (the top/first number):** This is the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats and sends blood into your arteries.
- **Diastolic blood pressure (the bottom/second number):** This is the pressure in your arteries when the heart fills with blood.

Blood pressure readings fall into the following categories:

- If the readings are below 120/80, they are in the **NORMAL** range. Stick with heart-healthy habits such as following a balanced diet and getting regular exercise.
- If the readings are 120/81 – 140/89, they are **MODERATELY ELEVATED**. Speak to a healthcare provider about these readings and follow a healthy lifestyle including having a balanced diet, regularly exercising, quitting smoking, and managing stress.
- If the readings are over 140/90, they are in the **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE** range. Speak to a healthcare provider and make healthy lifestyle changes.

Use these numbers as a guide. A single high reading is not necessarily an indication of a problem. A healthcare provider will check multiple blood pressure measurements over time before making a high blood pressure diagnosis and starting treatment. If you run a lower-than-usual blood pressure, you may be diagnosed with high blood pressure with measurements lower than 140/90.

A note on blood pressure medication:

If you are prescribed medication, do not stop taking it without talking to your healthcare provider. Keep all follow-up appointments to adjust treatment and manage risks. Finding the right dose and medication to control your blood pressure might take time. High blood pressure is a “silent killer” with no symptoms. Monitor it regularly and talk to your doctor if your numbers deviate from your normal range.

