

Get the Facts on:

# Blood Pressure

[www.harvardpilgrim.org](http://www.harvardpilgrim.org)

## What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure measures how hard the blood pushes against the walls of your blood vessels. This force is recorded as two numbers. The systolic number is recorded on top and the diastolic number on the bottom. A blood pressure measurement of 120/80 is expressed as “120 over 80.”

## What do the numbers mean?

The systolic pressure measures the force of the blood as the heart beats. The diastolic pressure measures this same force while the heart relaxes between beats. Both measurements are important.

Your blood pressure should be less than 120 systolic and less than 80 diastolic.

If your systolic blood pressure is 140 or higher or if your diastolic blood pressure is over 90 you may have high blood pressure. High blood pressure, also called “hypertension,” increases your chance (or risk) for getting heart disease, kidney disease, and stroke.

It is especially dangerous because it often has no warning signs. The good news is there are many lifestyle changes you can make to control or prevent high blood pressure. If necessary, your doctor may prescribe medications to help control your blood pressure.

## Blood Pressure

Category	Systolic	Diastolic
Desirable	less than 120 and	less than 80
Elevated	120-139 or	80-89
High	140-159 or	90-99
Very High	160 or higher or	100 or higher

Your Blood Pressure: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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## What steps can I take to prevent and control high blood pressure?

Having healthy habits is an effective first step in both preventing and controlling high blood pressure.

### ➔ Limit sodium (salt) intake.

- Limit the amount of sodium in your diet to no more than 2,300 milligrams per day. This is equal to one teaspoon of salt
- Look for foods that have 140 mg or less of sodium per serving
- If you have high blood pressure you should limit your sodium to less than 1,500 mg per day
- Take the salt shaker off the table
- Avoid using salt in recipes. Instead try adding herbs and spices to add flavor to your favorite dishes

### ➔ If you smoke, quit.

Quitting smoking is important for anyone with high blood pressure or any form of heart disease.

### ➔ Stay active!

Aim to get a total of at least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week.

### ➔ Limit alcohol use.

For men, limiting alcohol to two drinks (24 ounces of beer or 10 ounces of wine) per day, and one drink per day for women.

### ➔ Reduce stress.

Physical or emotional stress can cause a temporary increase in blood pressure.

### ➔ Eat healthy.

Eat whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, and low-fat dairy. Limit saturated fat and cholesterol. Avoid or limit processed foods like deli meats and frozen foods.

### ➔ Talk to your doctor.

If lifestyle changes alone are not enough to keep your blood pressure in control, it may be necessary for your doctor to prescribe a blood pressure medication.

### Questions to ask your doctor

- What is my blood pressure?
- What is my blood pressure goal?
- Is my blood pressure in control?
- What would be a healthy weight for me?
- Is it safe for me to exercise regularly?

## Where can I find out more about staying healthy and controlling my blood pressure?

### Visit [www.harvardpilgrim.org/wellness](http://www.harvardpilgrim.org/wellness) to:

- › Search *Health Topics A-Z* for up-to-date health and wellness information.
- › Find your own way to well-being with *My Way to Better*.
- › Learn about mindfulness meditation and its health benefits including reducing blood pressure.

