

What You Need to Know About Your Blood Pressure

At TotalWellness, we believe that everyone is healthy. That's right, everyone has existing healthy habits, whether getting eight hours of sleep, hanging out with friends or walking their dog.

We want you to figure out what healthy means to you and how you can build upon your healthy habits. So we created this series of I Am Healthy Guides to help you do just that. Because healthy is happy. It's more than just exercising and eating right. Healthy feels awesome.

Repeat After Us: I am healthy.

I AM

Two of the most powerful words; for what you put after them shapes your reality.

Medical Disclaimer

Please note that the material in this guide is provided by way of information. It is not a substitute, nor does it replace, medical or other professional advice, or treatment of health conditions.

Think of your veins as a garden hose and your blood as the water that runs through it. If the pressure in the hose increases – say, by clogging one end with your thumb – the added force might damage the hose. But you won't notice until the hose bursts. Likewise with high blood pressure, there are no obvious symptoms. You can have it for years without knowing it. During this time, though, HBP can damage your heart, blood vessels, kidneys, and other parts of your body. The best way to spot any issues is to have your blood pressure checked regularly.

Why does blood pressure matter?

Left untreated, high blood pressure (also known as hypertension) can be a “silent killer,” causing serious health problems such as stroke or organ damage without any preliminary symptoms. On the other side of the token, blood pressure that is too low can also signify other health problems within the body. Monitoring your blood pressure is a critical step in being in charge of your health; luckily, now that you have your numbers, you'll be able to take proactive steps in maintaining a healthy blood pressure!

How does blood pressure affect my body?

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood against the walls of your arteries in your circulatory system. When the force of the blood flow is too high, it can cause problems by stretching the tissue of your artery walls beyond its healthy limit. Over time, this can lead to a wide range of problems, including aneurysm, heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, and more.

What do my blood pressure numbers mean?

Blood pressure is measured by millimeter of mercury (mmHg) and is recorded as two numbers, written as a ratio (like 117/76 mmHg):

- **Systolic:** The top number measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats.
- **Diastolic:** The bottom number measures the pressure in between heartbeats.

How high is too high?

- Normal systolic is below 120 mmHg, and normal diastolic is below 80 mmHg.
- Here's a look at the four blood pressure categories. If your readings fall into two different categories, your correct blood pressure category is the higher category. For example, if your blood pressure reading is 125/95 you have stage 1 hypertension.

Category	Systolic (top number)		Diastolic (bottom number)
Normal	119 and below	And	79 and below
Prehypertension	120-139	Or	80-90
Stage 1 Hypertension	140-159	Or	90-99
Stage 2 Hypertension	160 and above	Or	100 and above

What affects my blood pressure reading?

Your blood pressure is determined by a variety of factors, but the exact cause is unknown. Some of the factors that are believed to contribute to your blood pressure are:

- Smoking: Smokers are more likely to develop high blood pressure and heart disease.
- Excess weight/obesity: In overweight individuals, the heart needs to do extra work to pump blood to the additional fat tissue in the body, often leading to high blood pressure.
- Lack of physical activity: A sedentary lifestyle contributes to the development of obesity and high blood pressure.
- Too much sodium: Some people have high sensitivity to sodium, and their blood pressure increases if they use salt.
- Too much alcohol consumption: Drinking more than 1-2 alcoholic drinks per day can raise your blood pressure.
- Stress: It's believed that short-term stress-related spikes in your blood pressure added up over time may put you at risk of developing long-term high blood pressure.
- Age: It's common for your systolic blood pressure to increase as you age.
- Genetic: People from African-Caribbean and South Asian communities are at greater risk of developing high blood pressure.
- Sex: Men are more at risk than women until age 55, when their respective risks are similar. At age 75 and older, women are more at risk than men.
- Family history: You are at greater risk if other members of your family already have the condition.
- Chronic kidney disease
- Adrenal and thyroid disorders

How can I treat high blood pressure?

If you have high blood pressure, always discuss treatment options with your physician first to determine the best course of action.

Here are a few ways you can lower your blood pressure:

- Watch your waistline: Carrying too much weight around your waist can put you at greater risk of high blood pressure. Losing just ten pounds can significantly improve your reading.
- Regular physical activity: Exercising at least 30 to 60 minutes on most days of the week can lower your blood pressure by 4 to 9 millimeters of mercury (mmHg).
- Reduce your sodium intake: Read food labels, eat less processed foods and don't add salt.
- Limit alcohol intake: Drinking more than 1-2 drinks/day can increase your blood pressure by more than a few points.
- Stop smoking: This is crucial for all aspects of your health, not just blood pressure.
- Medication: Talk with your physician about available treatment options.

Quick Tip

Stretching exercises can help improve circulation and help promote healthy blood pressure. Try this stretch every night before you hit the hay:

- Stand straight, step your right foot forward and lower your body into a lunge. Place your fingers on floor.
- Breathe in. Then, as you exhale, straighten your right leg. Gently return to the lunge position.
- Do this four times before switching sides and repeating.

Nutrition

Modifying what you eat everyday is perhaps the easiest and most effective way to reduce hypertension. Eating a diet that is rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products and skimps on saturated fat and cholesterol can lower your blood pressure by up to 14 mm Hg. This nutritional plan is known as the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet.

Eat More:

- Potassium
- Whole grains
- Legumes and nuts
- Fish
- Fruit – apples, bananas, grapes, melons, strawberries
- Leafy green vegetables, tomatoes, carrots and sweet potatoes

Eat Less:

- Sodium
- Saturated fats
- Trans fats

What else do I need to know about blood pressure?

One in three American adults has high blood pressure, but many are unaware of the problem. In fact, nearly one-third of people who do have high blood pressure don't know it. The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is through regular checkups and health screenings.

The most important thing you can do is be aware of your blood pressure levels. Talk with your physician and attend health screenings when they're offered. Over 67 million American adults have high blood pressure, and only about half of those adults has the condition under control. Speak with your doctor, follow a healthy diet and activity regimen, and do everything you can to lower your blood pressure. Doing so will reduce your risk of getting heart disease, having a stroke or suffering from kidney failure.

Forget The Notion That Being Physically Active Means Lifting Weights in the Gym

You can be active in many ways, including dancing, walking, gardening or playing you're your kids.

Whenever you can, fit in physical activity. Try taking the stairs, going for a walk during lunch or taking stretch breaks.

Have more questions? Email us at news@totalwellnesshealth.com!