

Blood Pressure Explained

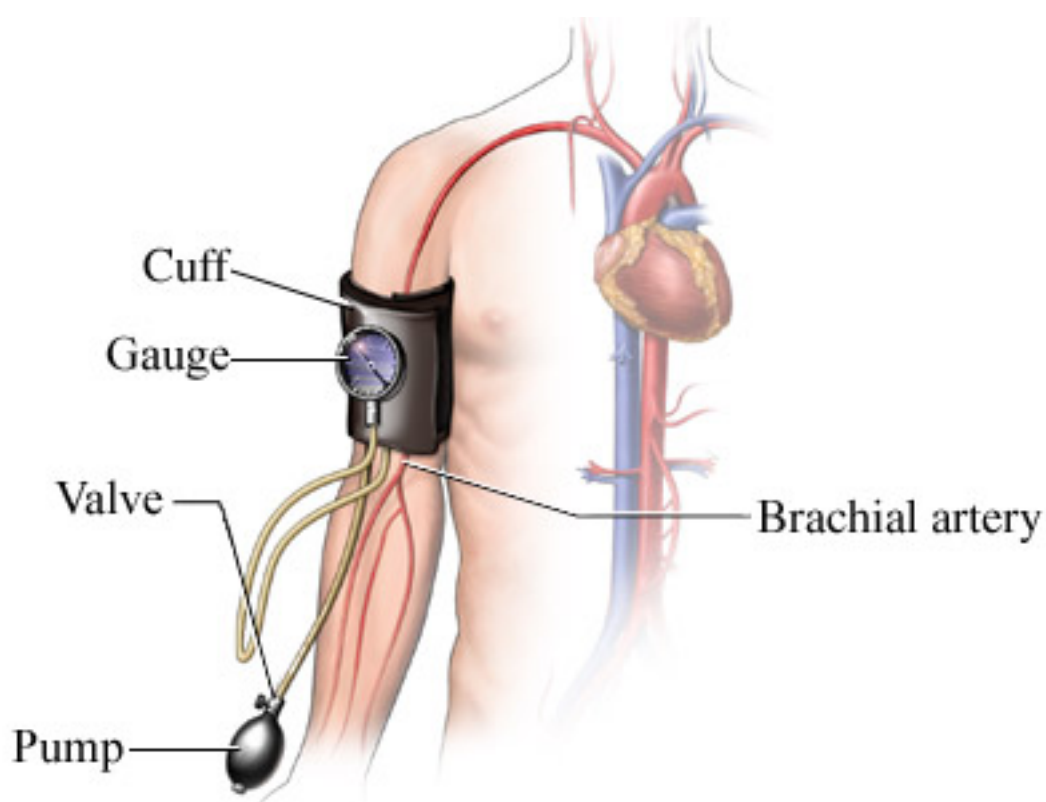
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Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood in the arteries as the heart pumps it around the body. Blood pressure does not stay the same all the time - it changes to meet your body's needs. If blood pressure remains high, it can lead to serious problems like a heart attack, stroke, heart failure or kidney disease.

Measuring Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is usually measured by an instrument called a sphygmomanometer. It is best to measure blood pressure when you are relaxed and sitting or lying down.



Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers, such as 120/80. The larger number indicates the pressure in the arteries as the heart squeezes out blood during each beat. It is called the systolic blood pressure. The lower number indicates the pressure as the heart relaxes before the next beat. It is called the diastolic blood pressure.

Blood Pressure Varies

Blood pressure changes to meet your body's needs. If a reading is high, your doctor will measure your blood pressure again on several separate occasions to confirm the level. Your doctor may also recommend that you measure your blood pressure at home or have a 24-hour recording with a monitor device. This can be useful if going to the clinic makes your blood pressure rise.

High Blood Pressure

There is no 'ideal' blood pressure reading. The following figures for clinic blood pressures can be used as a guide:

- Normal blood pressure: less than 120/80
- High/Normal: between 120/80 and 140/90
- High: equal to or more than 140/90
- Very high: equal to or more than 180/110

High blood pressure usually does not give warning signs. You can have high blood pressure and feel perfectly well. The only way to find out if your blood pressure is high is by having it checked regularly.

Controlling High Blood Pressure

If blood pressure remains high it can lead to serious problems. You will be more at risk of these problems if you smoke, are overweight, are physically inactive, have diabetes, have high blood cholesterol, are socially isolated and/or suffer from depression.

Lifestyle is very important to help to control high blood pressure and its associated risks. There are ways you can help to control or prevent high blood pressure. Medications may also be needed and, in some instances, a number of medications may be required long term.

Have your blood pressure checked regularly

If your blood pressure is 'normal' and you have no personal or family history of high blood pressure, a check every two years and during routine visits to your doctor is recommended. If your blood pressure is 'high-normal' (or higher) or you have a personal or family history of high blood pressure, stroke or heart attack, it is best to have it checked more frequently. Be advised by your doctor.

Be active every day

Establish or maintain at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on five or more days each week (150 minutes per week minimum). This can be accumulated in smaller bouts of 10 minutes or longer, if this is more convenient. Moderate intensity physical activity is activity that causes a 'moderate' noticeable increase in depth and rate of breathing while still being able to whistle or talk comfortably. This may include brisk walking, cycling, low-paced swimming or anything that you enjoy that requires the use of your major muscle groups. Some types of exercises, such as lifting heavy weights, should be avoided if you have high blood pressure. Check with your doctor before starting a new activity or increasing your level or intensity. Be active safely: build up your levels of activity gradually.

Enjoy Healthy Eating

Healthy eating is particularly important in controlling high blood pressure and reducing your risk of heart disease. Enjoying a variety of foods from the different food groups is the key to healthy eating.

Healthy eating is about choosing mainly plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruits and legumes (dried peas, dried beans and lentils); wholegrain bread and cereals; moderate amounts of lean meats, poultry, fish and reduced fat dairy products; and moderate amounts of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated oils and

fats.

Reducing salt intake can also help control high blood pressure or help avoid high blood pressure altogether. To reduce salt intake, eat plenty of vegetables, fruit and legumes; choose low salt wholegrain bread and cereals; avoid seasonings, processed foods and takeaway foods (which are high in salt); and avoid adding salt to cooking or at the table.

Other things you can do

You should also:

- Stop Drinking Alcohol.
- Be a non-smoker.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Take any blood pressure medication exactly as prescribed. Don't stop or change your medication unless advised to do so by your doctor.

Where to get help

- Your Doctor
- Community health centre
- Heart Foundation Tel. 1300 36 27 87
- For information on quitting smoking, call the Quitline Tel. 131 848
- Medicines Line Tel. 1300 888 763

Things to remember

- High blood pressure can lead to serious problems like heart attack, stroke or kidney disease.
- High blood pressure usually does not give warning signs so you need to have your blood pressure checked regularly.
- Lifestyle is very important in helping to control high blood pressure and its associated risks. Ask your doctor for advice.