

# Your Blood Pressure

**B**lood pressure is the pressure of the blood in the arteries as the heart pumps it around the body.

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers, e.g. 120 over 80 (120/80). The higher number indicates the pressure in the arteries as the heart squeezes out blood during each beat (systolic blood pressure). The lower number indicates the pressure as the heart relaxes before the next beat (diastolic blood pressure). It is measured in millimetres of mercury.

It is best to measure blood pressure when you are relaxed and sitting or lying down.

## Blood pressure varies

Blood pressure is always changing to meet your body's needs. If a reading is high, your doctor will measure your blood pressure again on several occasions to confirm the level. Your doctor may also recommend that you measure your blood pressure at home or have a recording with a monitoring device. Read more about measuring your blood pressure and monitoring devices in the Heart Foundation's information sheet *Self-Measurement of Blood Pressure* (available from Heartline 1300 36 27 87 or [www.heartfoundation.com.au](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au))

## What is high blood pressure?

There is no rule about what is high blood pressure, but the following figures are a useful guide:

**Normal blood pressure:** less than 120/80 (i.e. systolic less than 120 and diastolic less than 80). This is a guide only.

**High- normal blood pressure:** between 120/80 and 140/90.

**High blood pressure:** Equal to more than 140/90. If the level is confirmed

as equal to or more than 180/110 you have very high blood pressure.

## Why does blood pressure matter?

If your blood pressure remains high it can cause serious problems like a heart attack, stroke, heart failure or kidney disease. High blood pressure usually does not give warning signs. The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is by having it checked regularly.

## What can you do about high blood pressure?

Lifestyle is very important in helping to control high blood pressure and its associated risks. Your doctor will probably advise you to:

- Be a non-smoker;
- Reduce salt intake;
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight;
- Limit alcohol intake (no more than two drinks per day (men) or one drink per day (women));
- Undertake regular physical activity. *Note: Some specific types of exercises, such as body presses and heavy weight lifting, should be avoided by people with high blood pressure.*

Many people with high blood pressure require ongoing medication, it is important to take it exactly as prescribed. Don't stop or change it unless advised by your doctor.

You can help to prevent your blood pressure increasing and control the risk of heart disease.

- Have regular blood pressure checks. If your blood pressure is 'normal' and you have no personal or family history of the condition, the Heart Foundation recommends a check every two years and during routine doctor visits. If it 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 as advised by your doctor.
- Be a non-smoker.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.
- Be active every day for at least 30 minutes.
- Enjoy healthy eating. Choose mainly plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruits and legumes and grain-based foods (preferably wholegrain), moderate amounts of lean meats, poultry, fish and reduced-fat dairy products; and moderate amounts of polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fat.

For further information about blood pressure, contact the Heart Foundation's Heartline 1300 36 27 87 for a free *High Blood Pressure, the Facts* booklet or visit [www.heartfoundation.com.au](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au).



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