

# FitFacts®



## Numbers to Know: Blood Pressure

CHECKING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE (BP) IS A QUICK AND EASY WAY TO MEASURE THE HEALTH OF YOUR HEART. LET'S LEARN MORE ABOUT WHY YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE IS A NUMBER TO KNOW.

There are two different numbers in a blood pressure reading.

- The top number is the **systolic blood pressure**. This is the higher number and reflects the amount of pressure in the arteries when the heart muscle contracts (or “beats”).
- The bottom number is the **diastolic blood pressure**. This is the amount of pressure that remains in the arteries in between heartbeats, when the heart is relaxing and filling up with blood.

### WHAT YOUR NUMBERS MEAN

This chart shows the blood pressure categories that have been defined by the [American Heart Association](#).

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic mm Hg (upper #)		Diastolic mm Hg (lower #)
Normal	less than 120	and	less than 80
Prehypertension	120 – 139	or	80 – 89
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1	140 – 159	or	90 – 99
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2	160 or higher	or	100 or higher
<a href="#">Hypertensive Crisis</a> (Emergency care needed)	Higher than 180	or	Higher than 110

High blood pressure is often called “the silent killer” because it is a very dangerous condition that rarely causes physical symptoms. As your blood pressure rises above the normal range, so does your risk for conditions such as:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Heart failure
- Atherosclerosis (fatty buildup in the arteries)
- Kidney damage
- Vision loss
- Erectile dysfunction

The good news is that you can keep your blood pressure in check with a healthy diet and regular physical activity.\* In some cases, though, medical

\*Refer to our Fit Facts, “[DASH Diet](#)” and “[How to Start an Exercise Program](#)” for more information.

American Council on Exercise® is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people to live their most fit lives. In addition to offering quality certifications and education for health and fitness professionals, ACE also protects the public against ineffective products, programs and trends by arming them with unbiased, science-based health and fitness information. To learn more about ACE, or how you can use or purchase Fit Facts, visit [ACEfit.com/FitFacts](#).

treatment is still necessary in order to control high blood pressure.

If your blood pressure is above the normal range and was measured outside of your health care provider's office, schedule an appointment for further evaluation.

### Tips for an accurate blood pressure reading

- The blood pressure cuff should be the correct size.
  - A cuff that is too small will falsely elevate the reading, while a cuff that is too large will falsely lower the reading.
- The cuff should be placed on a bare arm that is resting on a surface at heart level.
- Sit comfortably for 2 minutes with back supported and both feet on the floor before taking BP.
- If necessary, repeat measurement after a minimum of 30-60 seconds.
- Do not talk while BP is being taken.
- Do not smoke, exercise, or drink caffeine for 30 minutes beforehand.

[If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, refer to our Fit Fact, “[Hypertension](#).”]

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[American Heart Association](#)

Chobanian, A., et al. (2003). Seventh report of the joint national committee on prevention, detection, evaluation, and treatment of high blood pressure. *Hypertension*, 42, 1206-1252.