

# Blood pressure: know your numbers

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(HealthDay)—Having high blood pressure makes you more likely to have heart disease or a stroke. But because high blood pressure doesn't usually cause warning symptoms, you could be at risk without even

knowing it.

That's why it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly by a healthcare professional.

High blood pressure is a particular concern if you're black because it's more prevalent among blacks than any other group in the United States. Research from Johns Hopkins University found that a primary cause of high blood pressure among blacks was stress.

However, anyone can develop [high blood pressure](#). When you have a blood pressure check:

- The first, or top, number in the reading is called the systolic number; the second, or lower, number, is the diastolic number.
- Normal blood pressure is less than 120 mmHg for [systolic pressure](#) and a diastolic level of less than 80mmHg.
- Pre-hypertension is a systolic of 120 to 139 mmHg or a diastolic of 80 to 89 mmHg.
- High blood pressure is a systolic of 140 mmHg or higher or a diastolic of 90 mmHg or higher.

If your blood pressure is normal, have it re-checked at least once every two years. If your blood pressure is higher than normal, follow your doctor's advice for getting it under control. You may need to check it yourself at home between office visits using a simple cuff monitor.

Though some people need medication to control high [blood pressure](#), the first steps are often healthy lifestyle changes, like eating more fruits and vegetables and cutting down on salt, unhealthy fats and cholesterol. Increasing exercise and limiting alcohol will also help.

To safeguard your health, make sure you know your numbers.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [high blood pressure](#).

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