

High Blood Pressure and Older Adults

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of arteries as the heart pumps blood. As we age, arteries get stiffer, causing blood pressure to go up. High blood pressure is common in older adults.



How High Blood Pressure Affects the Body

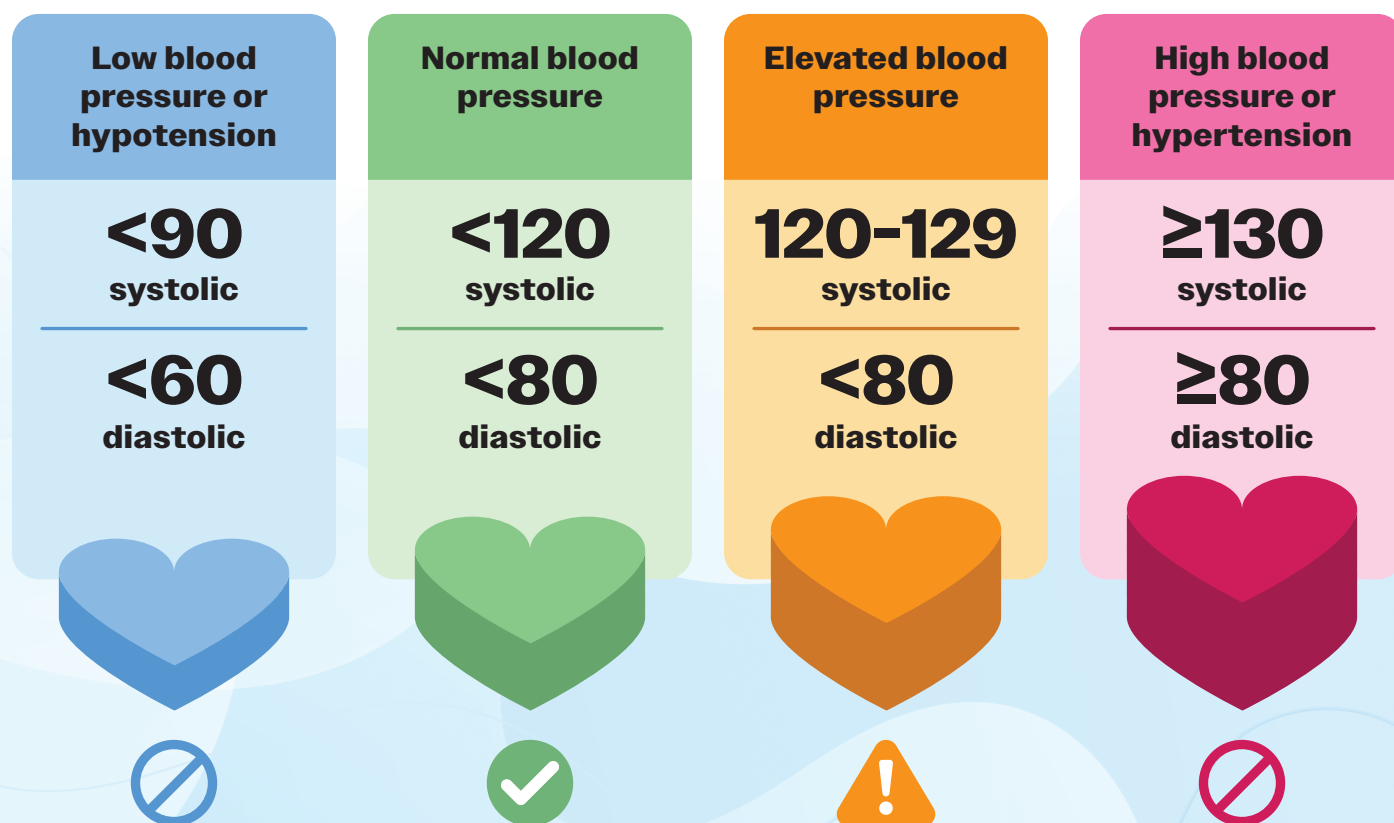
Untreated high blood pressure can increase your risk of serious health problems, including cardiovascular disease (such as heart disease and stroke), vascular dementia, eye problems, and kidney disease.

High Blood Pressure Symptoms

High blood pressure often doesn't cause symptoms that you can see or feel. However, some older adults may experience shortness of breath during light physical activity, lightheadedness upon standing too fast, and falls.

Blood Pressure Readings

In a blood pressure reading, the top number is called systolic blood pressure, and the bottom number is called diastolic blood pressure. Blood pressure readings are classified based on those two numbers:



Controlling High Blood Pressure

Your doctor will work with you to find a blood pressure target that is best for your well-being and may recommend exercising, making changes to your diet, and taking certain medications.

Lifestyle changes you can make to help prevent and lower high blood pressure:



Try to maintain a healthy weight. Ask your doctor if you need to lose weight.

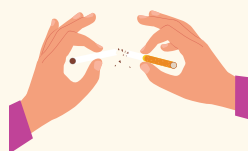


Drink less alcohol.

For those who drink, men should have no more than two drinks a day and women no more than one a day.



Exercise. Aim for at least 150 to 300 minutes of physical activity each week. Check with your doctor before starting an exercise plan.



Don't smoke. Smoking increases your risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and other health problems.



Eat a heart-healthy diet. Include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, protein, dairy, and healthy fats in your diet.



Get a good night's sleep.

Treating sleep apnea and getting a healthy amount of sleep can help to lower blood pressure.



Cut down on salt.

As you get older, the body and blood pressure become more sensitive to salt (sodium).



Manage stress. Coping with problems and reducing stress can help to lower blood pressure.

Medications for High Blood Pressure

In addition to recommending lifestyle changes, your doctor will likely prescribe medication to lower your blood pressure to a safe level. Medication can control your blood pressure, but it can't cure it. Healthy lifestyle changes may help lower the dose you need.

One reason to visit your doctor regularly is to have your blood pressure checked and, if needed, plan how to manage it. The good news is that most people can control their blood pressure.