

AUGUST 2008 HEALTH BULLETIN

This publication compiled and edited by the H.E.E.L. Program
(Health Education through Extension Leadership) Staff

What do the numbers mean?

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers—the **systolic pressure** (as the heart beats) over the **diastolic pressure** (as the heart relaxes between beats). The systolic number is on top and the diastolic number is on the bottom. For example, normal blood pressure is written as 120/80 mmHg (millimeters of mercury) and expressed verbally as "120 over 80."

How is Hypertension diagnosed?

Most doctors will diagnose a person with high blood pressure based on two or more elevated readings that are taken on several occasions. A **consistent** blood pressure reading of **140/90 mmHg or higher** is considered high blood pressure, another term for hypertension.

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African Americans & Hypertension: The Silent Killer

Blood pressure is the force of blood through the body in arteries. High blood pressure often has **no** signs or symptoms. The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to be tested for it. Many African Americans do not fully understand the value of the information held in these two numbers.

Categories for Blood Pressure

Levels in Adults

(Ages 18 Years and Older)



Blood Pressure Level

Category	Systolic	and	Diastolic
Normal	< 120		< 80
Pre-Hypertension	120-139	or	80-89

High Blood Pressure

Stage 1 Hypertension	140-159	or	90-99
Stage 2 Hypertension	≥ 160	or	≥ 100

Legend

< means LESS THAN

≥ means GREATER THAN OR EQUAL TO

When systolic and diastolic blood pressures fall into different categories, the higher category should be used to classify blood pressure level. For example, 160/80 mmHg would be Stage 2 Hypertension (high blood pressure).

Source: National Heart, Blood and Lung Institute

Why are the numbers important to us?

High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes the heart work too hard. It also makes the walls of the arteries hard. High blood pressure increases the **risk for heart disease and stroke**, the first- and third-leading causes of death for Americans.

High blood pressure can also cause other problems, such as heart failure, kidney disease, and blindness. In African Americans, high blood pressure occurs more often than in white Americans. It begins at an earlier age and is usually more severe.

Furthermore, African Americans have a higher death rate from stroke and kidney disease than white Americans.

Treatment

Adopting healthy lifestyle habits is an effective first step in both preventing and controlling high blood pressure. If lifestyle changes alone are not effective in keeping your pressure controlled, it may be necessary to add blood pressure medications.

Your healthcare provider may prescribe more than one medication to get your blood pressure controlled. It is important that you take the medication as prescribed and tell the provider of any and all other medications you may already take.

For more information on health issues in Kentucky, contact your local county Extension agent or visit the HEEL website at: www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL

Sources:

- Centers for Disease Control www.cdc.gov
- National Heart Blood and Lung Institute www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- Office of Minority Health www.hrsa.gov

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Prevention

Once high blood pressure develops, it usually lasts a lifetime. The good news is, treatment can control high blood pressure. In addition, lifestyle changes can prevent and control high blood pressure. You can prevent and control high blood pressure by taking action. These include:

- Losing weight if overweight (losing 10 lbs. can help)
- Increasing physical activity (walking 30 minutes each day) Following a healthy eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy
- Choosing and preparing foods with less salt and sodium
- Quit smoking
- And if you drink alcoholic beverages, drink in moderation.



If you are pregnant make sure you are under a doctors care. High blood pressure is a major cause of complications in pregnancy.

***NOTE:** If lifestyle changes alone are not effective in keeping your blood pressure controlled, there are many blood pressure medications to help you.*

GET MOVING KENTUCKY!
MONTHLY HEALTH TIP
Reduce your risk with physical activity!
 Regular physical activity can reduce your risk of developing or dying from heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, and high blood pressure. Physical activity doesn't have to be difficult or take up too much time, even a 10 minute walk a day will put you on the path to better health!

