

# Blood Pressure Testing

## What is High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for a heart attack or stroke. The blood pressure denotes the resistance produced each time the heart beats and sends blood coursing through the arteries. The peak reading of the pressure exerted by this contraction is the systolic pressure. Between beats the heart relaxes, and blood pressure drops. The lowest reading is referred to as the diastolic pressure. A normal blood pressure reading for an adult is: 120 (systolic) / 80 (diastolic). Readings above this level are a major risk factor for heart attack and stroke. High blood pressure readings can be divided into the following levels:



## Tests for High Blood Pressure

The only way to tell whether you have high blood pressure is to have it measured with a blood pressure cuff (sphygmomanometer). This device consists of a gauge and a rubber cuff that is placed around your arm and inflated. Having your blood pressure measured is painless and takes just a few minutes.

## How exercise can lower your blood pressure

How are high blood pressure and exercise connected?

Regular physical activity makes your heart stronger. A stronger heart can pump more blood with less effort. If your heart can work less to pump, the force on your arteries decreases, lowering your blood pressure.

Becoming more active can lower your systolic blood pressure — the top number in a blood pressure reading — by an average of 4 to 9 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). That's as good as some blood pressure medications. For some people, getting some exercise is enough to reduce the need for blood pressure medication.

If your blood pressure is at a desirable level — less than 120/80 mm Hg — exercise can help keep it from rising as you age. Regular exercise also helps you maintain a healthy weight, another important way to control blood pressure.

But to keep your blood pressure low, you need to keep exercising. It takes about one to three months for regular exercise to have an impact on your blood pressure. The benefits last only as long as you continue to exercise.

