

Blood Pressure Information Sheet

What is blood pressure?

Your heart pumps blood around your body by contracting and relaxing at a regular rhythm. Blood pressure is the highest pressure at which your blood is pushed out through the arteries and around your body when your heart contracts, and also the lowest pressure in your veins when blood returns to your heart as it relaxes. Therefore, a blood pressure measurement results in two numbers: the 'systolic' or upper number (heart contracting) and the 'diastolic' or lower number (heart relaxing) – average blood pressure is typically presented as '120/80'.

What is heart rate?

Your heart rate is the number of times your heart beats or pumps in a minute. Your heart rate goes up and down depending on what you are doing or how you are feeling. For example, it goes up when you exercise as the need for oxygen and blood is greater when your muscles are working hard. Normal heart rate when resting is 60-80 beats per minute.

How will my blood pressure be measured?

The interviewer will wrap a piece of material (called a 'cuff') around your upper arm. If you are wearing anything bulky like a sweater, you will have to take your arm out of the sleeve first so that the cuff fits properly. The cuff is attached to a small machine that will automatically tighten and release the cuff to take the measurement. It will only take a few seconds. The process does not involve any needles or other medical instruments. The interviewer will also record your heart rate when they measure your blood pressure.

The interviewer would like to take this measurement twice at two different points in the interview. If you would prefer not to have your blood pressure measured, you can skip it and continue with the rest of the interview as normal.

Why are researchers interested in knowing the blood pressure of young people?

Blood pressure is a useful indicator of heart health and high blood pressure is associated with an increased risk for a number of serious health problems such as heart attack, stroke and kidney damage later in life. High blood pressure generally has no symptoms so the only way to know if someone has high blood pressure is to measure it. Risk factors that increase the chance of having high blood pressure include being older, being male, being overweight, smoking and poor diet.

Often young people do not have their blood pressure measured on a regular basis as they are generally regarded as being at low risk of high blood pressure. However, researchers are interested in knowing whether, for example, certain lifestyles are associated with high blood pressure or 'pre-high' blood pressure even in younger people; and also whether people who develop high blood pressure in later adulthood show earlier signs that might be detected at a younger age.

What if I am worried about my blood pressure?

The chart over the page gives some information on what is a healthy blood pressure, and what is less healthy. **The interviewer will not be able to discuss your individual circumstances with you as they are not medically trained. If you have any concerns you should consult your GP. You should not assume that your blood pressure is healthy just because you receive no feedback from the interviewer – no one in the study will get feedback regardless of their blood pressure measurement.**

Blood Pressure Readings

This sheet provides some background information on blood pressure readings. It is intended for information only and is not a diagnosis or advice. The interviewer who has measured your blood pressure today is not a medical professional and has not taken the measurement in a clinical setting.

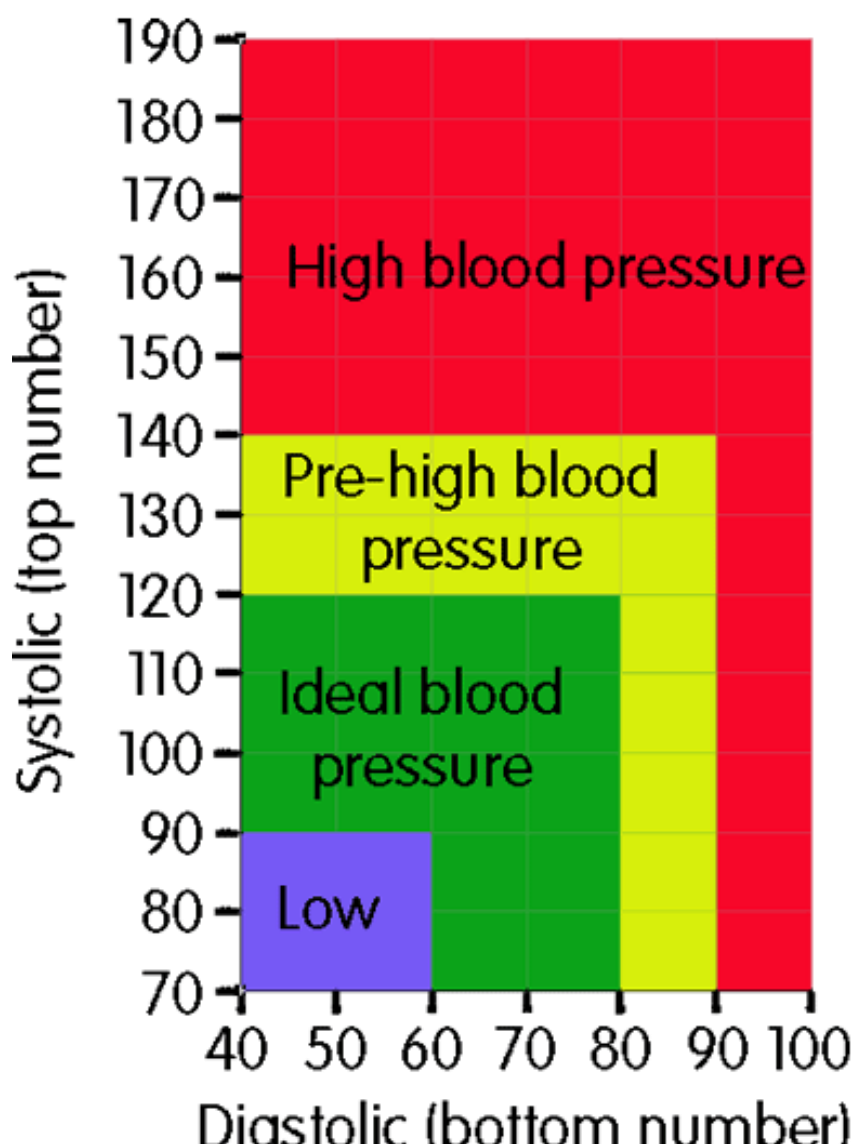
If you have any concerns or queries about your blood pressure, please contact your family doctor.

The chart below is also available online from:

<http://www.bloodpressureuk.org/BloodPressureandyou/Thebasics/Bloodpressurechart>.

Two numbers are used to measure blood pressure. The top number (systolic) is the pressure as the heart pushes blood out and the bottom number is the pressure as the heart relaxes and fills back up with blood.

Blood pressure chart for adults



Using this blood pressure chart: To work out what your blood pressure readings mean, just find your top number (systolic) on the left side of the blood pressure chart and read across, and your bottom number (diastolic) on the bottom of the blood pressure chart. Where the two meet is your blood pressure.

Chart reproduced with permission from *Blood Pressure UK*