What Is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of arteries. 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 measurement is written one above or before the other, with the systolic number on top and the diastolic number on the bottom. For example, a blood pressure measurement of 120/80 mmHg (millimeters of mercury) is expressed verbally as "120 over 80." Normal blood pressure is less than 120 mmHg systolic and less than 80 mmHg diastolic.

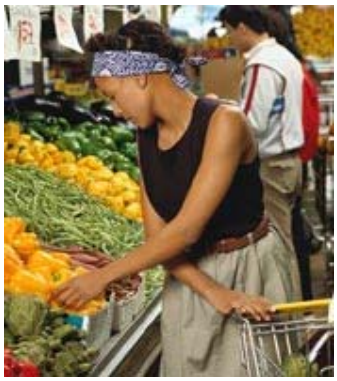
Categories for Blood Pressure Levels in Adults

(Ages 18 Years and Older)

	Blood Pressure Level (mmHg)		
Category	**Systolic**		**Diastolic**
Normal	< 120	and	< 80
Prehypertension	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).



Prevention

You can take steps to prevent high blood pressure by adopting a healthy lifestyle. These steps include maintaining a healthy weight; being physically active; following a healthy eating plan, that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and lowfat dairy foods; choosing and preparing foods with less salt and sodium; and, if you drink alcoholic beverages, drinking in moderation. In this section you will learn more about healthy lifestyle habits for preventing and controlling high blood pressure.

- Following a Healthy Eating Pattern
- Reducing Salt and Sodium in Your Diet
- Maintaining a Healthy Weight
- Being Physically Active
- Limiting Alcohol Intake
- Quitting Smoking
- Q&A on Other Factors Affecting Blood Pressure

Treatment of High Blood Pressure

It is important to take steps to keep your blood pressure under control. The treatment goal is blood pressure below 140/90 and lower for people with other conditions, such as diabetes and kidney disease. 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.

Reference source: National Heart Lung Blood Institute
http://www.nhlbi.gov
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/prevent/prevent.htm