

Tips that Count

Wellness information for your journey to a healthier you!

What Do Those Blood-Pressure Numbers Mean?

If your doctor tells you that your blood pressure is “120 over 80” (120/80), should you be happy or concerned?

The first number (120) refers to your *systolic* blood pressure. It’s the measure of the pressure right after your heart contracts to pump the blood through your blood vessels, which means it’s the moment when blood pressure is highest. The second number (80) stands for *diastolic* blood pressure; it’s the measure of your blood pressure at its lowest, when your heart is relaxed between beats.

If your blood pressure is 120/80, you can be glad, since this reading is considered optimal for an adult. (Defining one optimal level is difficult however: When it comes to blood pressure values, lower is almost always better—unless the person is in shock.)

If a person’s blood pressure begins to creep up and these numbers increase, someone with a *systolic* number between 120 and 139 and a *diastolic* number between 80 and 89 is said to be at risk for *hypertension* (or to be *pre-hypertensive*).

If a person’s systolic number rises above 140, or the diastolic number becomes greater than 90, or both—for a reading above 140/90—then that person has full-blown high blood pressure (*hypertension*), and can be said to be *hypertensive*.



All information is intended for your general knowledge only and is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment for specific medical conditions. You should seek prompt medical care for any specific health issues and consult your physician before starting a new fitness regimen.