

Understanding Your Blood Pressure Readings Can Have A Big Impact On Your Health

It has become increasingly well known that very high or very low blood pressure is dangerous to your health, but many people are confused about the actual meanings of the blood pressure readings. They are always presented as a ratio, for example, 119/82, which is read as “one nineteen over eighty-two.” But what do these numbers actually measure, and what is a healthy range?

Many people who are at risk of complications due to abnormal blood pressure don't monitor their levels frequently enough because of the confusion surrounding the readings. If you only get your blood pressure checked during your yearly physical, this typically isn't a problem as the doctor can explain the readings to you. However, monitoring your blood pressure at home is easy thanks to affordable devices, and knowing the trends of your blood pressure readings on a daily basis can help you know if there may be a larger issue that needs to be checked out.

Health risks of abnormal blood pressure

In addition to blood pressure readings not being widely understood, most people are also unaware of many of the health risks posed by untreated blood pressure conditions. Consistent low blood pressure, also known as hypotension, is most commonly seen in adults over the age of 65, people taking certain medications, or those who have been diagnosed with certain diseases, such as Parkinson's. It often leads to spells of dizziness or fainting, which pose a risk of injury due to falling. In severe cases, low blood pressure can contribute to strokes or heart attacks.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is more common, and if left unchecked can lead to even more serious health problems. Uncontrolled high blood pressure carries an increased risk of stroke, heart attack, dementia, kidney disease, eye problems, and more.

How to know what your readings mean

To the layman, the numbers in a blood pressure reading can sound almost inconsequential. In truth, they are crucial for physicians to monitor the performance of your heart. Your heart is constantly performing thousands of life-critical functions every second as it sends blood to all organs in the body. Large deviations from the normal blood pressure range can have a significant impact on the heart's ability to effectively do its job.

In the previous example of a reading of 119/82, the top number (119) is called the systolic reading, and the bottom number (82) is called the diastolic

reading. They act as the markers for the parameters of your blood pressure, both while at rest and while under pressure. The systolic reading measures the pressure of your blood while the heart is forcing blood through your arteries, which is why it's always the higher number. The diastolic number measures the lower pressure of your blood while the heart is at rest, which is why it's lower.

Because they measure the pressure under different conditions, they act like the bookends for your overall pressure. These numbers tell your cardiologist if there are any serious issues with how your heart is functioning.

Maintaining a healthy blood pressure level

While some people have naturally low blood pressure and others tend to have higher numbers, there is a generally accepted range of what is considered normal. These are the blood pressure readings and their meanings as categorized by the American Heart Association:

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic mm Hg (upper #)		Diastolic mm Hg (lower #)
Normal	less than 120	and	less than 80
Prehypertension	120 – 139	or	80 – 89
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1	140 – 159	or	90 – 99
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2	160 or higher	or	100 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis (Emergency care needed)	Higher than 180	or	Higher than 110



As mentioned before, there is a range of what is generally considered to be normal. Your primary care physician may begin a treatment plan if your blood pressure is higher than it should be. They will assess your reading along with other health factors to determine an appropriate treatment. This could be anything from simple diet and lifestyle changes if you are in the early stages of hypertension, to medication or other more immediate remedies. If you would like some smart tips on keeping your blood pressure under control, be sure to look over our previous posts on tips to combat high blood pressure on our website at heartrhythmdoc.com.

If you are concerned with your heart health or if your primary care physician recommends that you see a heart specialist, contact Heart Rhythm Consultants in the Sarasota / Tampa Bay area. Our practice specializes in ablation therapies for treating AFib, and is now also actively seeing patients from the Sun City Center and Port Charlotte areas.

Call our office today to speak with a care coordinator: (941) 484-6758

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