

# Hypertension Toolkit

## An Educational Guide to Help you Prevent or Manage Hypertension

### If you have hypertension (high blood pressure), you are not alone.

About half of Americans have high blood pressure, but it can be managed by making healthy lifestyle changes. Review this toolkit whenever you need, whether at the onset of your diagnosis or as a quick refresher!



### What is Blood Pressure?

This is the pressure of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries, which carries blood from your heart to other areas of the body. Blood pressure rises and falls throughout the day.

There are two readings for blood pressure. The first number is your **systolic** blood pressure, measuring the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The second number is your **diastolic** blood pressure, which measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests between beats. Normal blood pressure is less than **120/80mmHg**.

*Please note that your doctor should determine the goal for your blood pressure readings based on your individual health needs.*

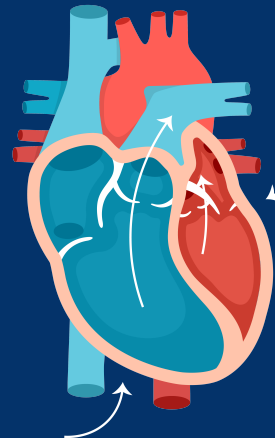
### What is Hypertension?

Hypertension is high blood pressure (HBP), which can put you at a higher risk for serious health complications. **High blood pressure typically does not have any warning signs.** Measuring your blood pressure is the only way to determine if you have high blood pressure.



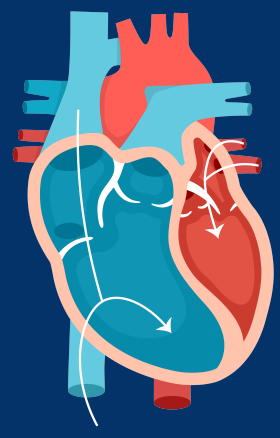
### Systolic vs. Diastolic Pressure

# 120/80



#### SYSTOLIC

Measures the pressure in your arteries **when your heart beats.**



#### DIASTOLIC

Measures the pressure in your arteries **when your heart rests between beats.**

**It is important to monitor your blood pressure because there are major health complications associated with untreated hypertension.**

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Heart failure
- Kidney disease or failure
- Vision loss
- Sexual dysfunction
- Angina (chest pain)

## Hypertension and Cardiovascular Risk Factors

### Modifiable

It is important to address any of the following modifiable cardiovascular risk factors. These factors are impacted by your lifestyle and daily behaviors and can play a role in high blood pressure.



**Current cigarette smoking and secondhand smoke**



**Diabetes**



**High cholesterol**



**Overweight/obesity**



**Unhealthy diet**



**High alcohol consumption**



**Sleep apnea**



**Smoking/tobacco use**



**Stress**

### Fixed

There are a few relatively fixed risk factors that are associated with hypertension.



**Family history**



**Age**



**Gender**



**Race**



**Chronic kidney disease**

### Measuring your blood pressure

Measuring your blood pressure is an important way to monitor your hypertension.

**You can get it checked in the following ways:**



**By a healthcare practitioner at a doctor's office**



**At a pharmacy with a digital blood pressure measurement machine**



**With an at home blood pressure monitor**



**About 50% of Americans**

have high blood pressure, but it can be managed.

### What impacts blood pressure readings?

**Being nervous about taking your blood pressure:**

“**White coat syndrome**” is a term for when someone gets a high blood pressure reading in a doctor's office but reads normal at home. This can be attributed to the anxiety someone may experience at medical appointments. It is important to monitor your blood pressure at home when this occurs. Your doctor can check the accuracy of your home blood pressure cuff and document blood pressure reading taken at home in your medical record.

**Things you ate, drank, or did before your blood pressure reading:** Caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes, and exercising within 30 minutes of taking your blood pressure can all impact blood pressure readings.

**How you are sitting:**

Crossing your legs and improperly resting your arms on a table at chest height can also increase your blood pressure readings.



## Categories of Hypertension and Action Items You Can Take



BP Category	Systolic (top number)	Diastolic (bottom number)	Action Items You Can Take!
<b>*Normal</b>	<120 (and)	<80	No changes needed – continue following a heart-healthy eating plan, engage in routine exercise, and take your medications as prescribed
<b>Elevated</b>	120 – 129 (and)	<80	Protect Yourself! Learn what could make you more likely to exacerbate your HBP and take steps to reduce your risk. Make important changes to control your HBP such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat a heart-healthy diet</li> <li>• Limit alcohol</li> <li>• Engage in physical activity</li> <li>• Manage your stress</li> <li>• Adhere to your medications</li> <li>• Work with your healthcare provider</li> </ul>
<b>Hypertension Stage 1</b>	130 – 139 (or)	80 – 89	Talk to your primary care provider and cardiologist on ways to properly manage your worsening HBP
<b>Hypertension Stage 2</b>	> = 140 (or)	> = 90	Talk to your primary care provider and cardiologist on ways to properly manage your worsening HBP
<b>Hypertensive Crisis</b>	>180	And / or >120	Call 911 if your blood pressure is higher than 180/120 mmHg and you are experiencing symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, numbness or tingling sensations, or vision loss

*\*Note: Your provider may recommend a different "normal range" to follow. Please visit your PCP for specific medical instructions.*





## Stress Management and High Blood Pressure

When you are stressed, it can lead to short-term spikes in blood pressure. It is important to take steps to reduce your stress and help improve heart health. Stress can be a contributor to risk factors of hypertension such as an unhealthy diet and excess alcohol consumption. Stress can also cause our bodies to release hormones like adrenaline and cortisol into the blood. Adrenaline and cortisol are meant for a “fight or flight” response, causing your heart to beat faster. When you’re facing constant stress, it can contribute to high blood pressure.



### Lifestyle strategies to improve control of or prevent the onset of hypertension



**Tobacco cessation**



**Weight loss**



**Sodium reduction / diet change, such as following the DASH Diet**

*The VA / DoD recommends that sodium intake be capped at no more than 2,300 mg/day*



**Physical activity**

*The VA / DoD recommends at least 120 minutes of aerobic exercise per week for improvements in blood pressure*



**Stress management**



**Reduce excessive alcohol intake**



**Monitor your blood pressure**

When you’re facing constant stress, it can contribute to high blood pressure.

### Best Ways to Handle Stress:



**Exercise routinely**



**Stay connected to friends and family**



**Get a good night of sleep**



**Practice mindfulness and meditation to help calm you**



What is the DASH diet?

DASH stands for dietary approaches to stop hypertension.

The DASH diet’s goal is to help you manage your hypertension and prioritize foods lower in sodium, cholesterol, saturated fats and trans fats. The DASH diet encourages the consumption of foods that are rich in potassium, calcium, magnesium, fiber, and protein. Having a healthy diet will help you manage your hypertension.

A Few Examples Include:






- ✓ Vegetables
- ✓ Fruits
- ✓ Whole grains
- ✓ Low-fat dairy products
- ✓ Fish
- ✓ Poultry
- ✓ Beans
- ✓ Nuts and seeds
- ✓ Vegetable oils



Talk to your doctor today about healthy eating habit changes that can help you manage HBP and / or receive a referral to a dietician or receive other support as needed.

DASH Eating Plan

The Benefits: Lowers blood pressure & LDL “bad” cholesterol.

 Eat This	 Limit This
 Vegetables	 Fatty meats
 Fruits	
 Whole grains	 Full-fat dairy
 Fat-free or low-fat dairy	
 Fish	 Sugar sweetened beverages
 Poultry	
 Beans	 Sweets
 Nuts & seeds	
 Vegetable oils	 Sodium intake

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/DASH](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/DASH)



National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



# Blood Pressure Log

**Use this to keep track of your blood pressure at home.**

Try to take your blood pressure at the same time each day and take at least two readings, 1 or 2 minutes apart. Please remember to share this log with your doctor!

**If your blood pressure readings are above 180 / 120 mm Hg and you are experiencing symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, numbness or tingling sensations, or vision loss, please call 911.**

[illegible]

## Additional Resources to Help YOU

USFHP is excited to share news about some helpful apps available to you for **free!** There is no cost to download, and they do not collect any of your information. The apps were created by the US Department of Veteran Affairs National Center for hypertension.



### FREE Weight Management App

This app is called MOVE! Coach and is designed to help you manage your weight. Within the app, you can do the following:

- Build weight management skills to learn about healthy eating and routine exercise
- Keep a daily weight diary to track your progress on healthy eating and exercise to help reach your weight management goals
- Use calculation tools to find your exercise intensity, calories burned and activity – to – step conversion

### FREE Mindfulness App

This app is called Mindfulness Coach and is designed to help you manage stress. This app assists you with the practice of mindfulness meditation, which can help reduce stress. Within this app, you can do the following:

- Engage in a self-guided training program to help you understand and adopt a simple mindfulness practice
- Practice with 12 audio-guided mindfulness exercises
- Track your progress over time, with customizable reminders



**Use this QR code to download the app today!**



**Use this QR code to download the app today!**

## Need more resources and individualized help?

At USFHP, we have a comprehensive care management program. Our nurse care managers can help you manage your chronic health conditions, including hypertension. If you want to speak to a USFHP nurse care manager about our free care management program, call (800) 241-4848.

### Resources:

- VA\_DoD\_CPG\_for\_the\_Diagnosis\_and\_Management\_of\_Hypertension\_in\_the\_Primary\_Care\_Setting
- <https://aha-clinical-review.ascendeventmedia.com/books/aha-high-blood-pressure-toolkit/2/>
- [https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/inline-images/DASH%20Eating%20Plan%20Pinterest\\_V3.jpg](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/inline-images/DASH%20Eating%20Plan%20Pinterest_V3.jpg)
- <https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/measure.htm>
- <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/health-threats-from-high-blood-pressure>
- Blood pressure cuff: Does size matter? - Mayo Clinic
- <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/changes-you-can-make-to-manage-high-blood-pressure>





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to Help You Prevent or  
Manage Hypertension*

## SIZE MATTERS!

### Cuff sizing is important.

The cuff should be **wide enough to cover 40 to 80% of the distance from your elbow to your shoulder**. If the cuff is too small or too large it can provide inaccurate readings. If you're unsure about the size of your cuff, please ask your doctor.



**Cuff Too Small**  
Falsely High Reading



**Cuff Too Large**  
Falsely Low Reading

### Tips for measuring your blood pressure

- ✓ Make sure you have the right size blood pressure cuff.
- ✓ Don't eat or drink anything 30 minutes prior to taking your blood pressure
- ✓ Empty your bladder prior to the reading
- ✓ Sit in a chair with your back supported
- ✓ Put both feet on the ground
- ✓ Rest your arm bare on a table at chest height
- ✓ Don't talk during the reading
- ✓ Bring your at-home reading to your doctor's appointment to compare results
- ✓ Take your blood pressure reading in a "normal temperature" environment—not too hot or cold

