

# Understanding Blood Pressure

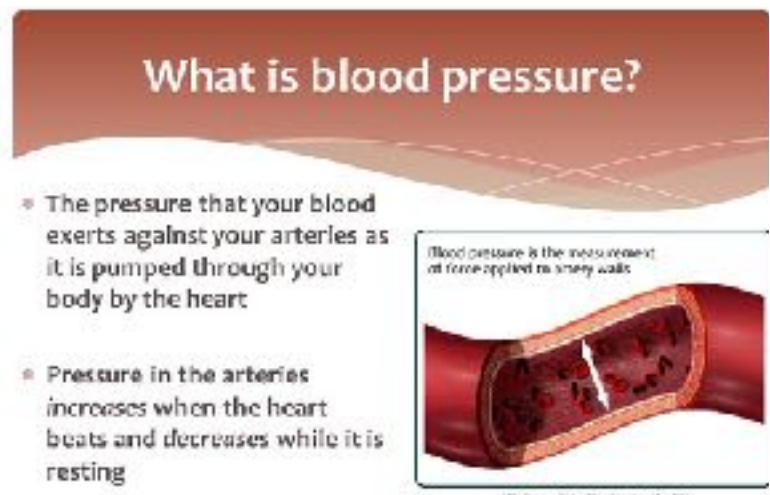
## What is Blood Pressure?

It is simply the pressure of your blood pushing out against the walls of your blood vessels. You need a certain minimum pressure to keep blood vessels open, and to allow blood to flow around our body.

If the pressure is too low, the brain and the body cannot be supplied efficiently with the oxygen and nutrients that the blood transports.

An ideal resting pressure rises quickly to meet extra demand (at times of stress, exertion or exercise for example), but then returns quickly to normal levels when that extra demand is over.

If pressure is too high for long periods, even at rest, problems occur. The heart has to work much harder than normal, blood vessels thicken and become less elastic, and other body organs can suffer damage.



## Why do I need to know my Blood Pressure?

There are 16 million people living in the U.K who have high blood pressure, but around a third (over 5 million) of them don't know they have it. That's because generally it doesn't give us any symptoms ... **THE ONLY WAY TO KNOW IS BY HAVING IT MEASURED!**

Unlike most medical conditions, high blood pressure (known as Hypertension) rarely causes any obvious symptoms. So it can go on unnoticed and uncorrected for years, slowly causing damage to your heart, eyes, kidneys and blood vessels.

If you have prolonged high blood pressure you are **3 times** more likely to develop heart disease or suffer a stroke as someone who has blood pressure in the ideal range, and **twice** as likely to die from the condition!

**High blood pressure (Hypertension)** has been described as “**the Silent Killer**” because it is the main risk factor for you having a stroke, a major factor in your chances of having a heart attack, heart failure or kidney disease, and is also involved in dementia .....

**but all of it's effects can be avoided by early detection and management.**

**Low blood pressure (Hypotension)** can be a natural state of affairs for some people, or can occur as a result of a medical condition, or as a side effect of medication that is being taken. It is quite common for people to experience *Postural Hypotension* as they get older, with a feeling of dizziness after getting up quickly from a chair.

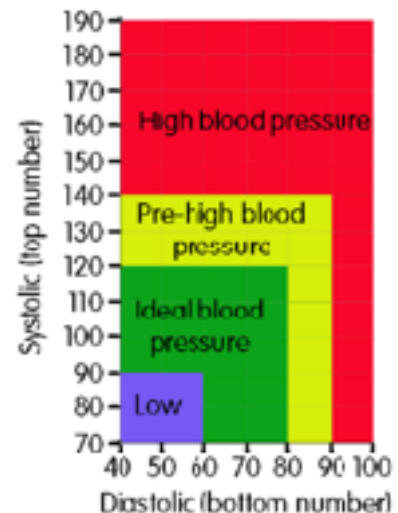
## What do the numbers mean?

You will be given two numbers to represent your blood pressure when you are at rest ... such as 135 / 85.

The higher number is your Systolic pressure. This is the pressure produced when your heart contracts.

The lower figure is your Diastolic pressure. This is the pressure that remains within your blood vessel when the heart is relaxed (between beats).

You can use this chart to show how your own blood pressure compares to the ideal. Find the higher number (systolic) on the left side of the chart and read across, and the lower number (diastolic) on the bottom of the chart and read up. Where the two meet indicates the range in which your blood pressure reading falls.



Some people do experience “*white coat syndrome*”, where anxiety can temporarily increase their B.P while it is being checked, but a diagnosis of High Blood Pressure would never be made on the basis of a single reading.

**Fact: Between the age of 40 and 70, each 20 (Systolic) or 10 (Diastolic) increase above 120/80 DOUBLES your risk of suffering from heart disease or having a stroke.**

Getting your blood pressure checked means that **if the levels are higher than ideal, you can do something about it.**

Your G.P may suggest medication if your resting B.P is consistently in the high range, or if you have other conditions that increase your risk. But ... **ANY level above ‘ideal’ should make you consider what Lifestyle changes YOU can make to help lower your blood pressure (see suggestions below)**

## What should I do about my Blood pressure?

*To greatly reduce your chances of developing health problems in the future,*

1. Get your blood pressure checked whatever your age ( then at least once every five years for the over 40's, or more regularly if your G.P advises).  
***If you know you have a problem you can do something about it!***
2. Discuss any concerns with your G.P. Other medical conditions that you may have might have an effect on management.
3. If your G.P prescribes any medication make sure you take it regularly.

*Make some changes to your Lifestyle such as:*

- Keep to a healthy **Weight**
- Improve your **Diet** (more fruit and vegetables, less sugar and fat)
- Consume **less Salt** (there are high levels in soups, processed foods and bread)
- Be more **Active** (anything is better than nothing, if vigorous exercise isn't for you, build activity into your day)
- Stop **Smoking**
- Reduce your **Alcohol** intake
- Improve your **Sleep** (the quality and the quantity)
- Do something to help **manage your own Stress and Anxiety** (find out how you can build your Resilience and change your Mindset regarding Stress. Maybe discover how YOU can employ Breathing techniques, Mindfulness, and other Mind-Body techniques to help)

### Links to more information

- UK Blood Pressure Guide / Statistics / Medications [www.bloodpressureUK.org](http://www.bloodpressureUK.org)
- High Blood Pressure [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- Hypertension in adults - NICE guidelines [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)
- Hypertension / High blood pressure health centre [www.webmd.boots.com](http://www.webmd.boots.com)
- Stress and High Blood Pressure, what's the connection [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)
- Just Breathe: How to use breathing exercises to lower B.P [www.universityhealthnews.com](http://www.universityhealthnews.com)
- How deep breathing control lowers blood pressure [www.resperate.com](http://www.resperate.com)
- Meditation and Heart Health - American Heart Organisation [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)
- Mindfulness training helps lower Blood Pressure [www.medicalnewstoday.com](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com)