

# Measure Your Blood Pressure



Uncontrolled high blood pressure, or hypertension, is one of the greatest threats to the health of Mississippians. In fact, 11 states—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Mississippi—are known as the “Stroke Belt States” because of the high rate of strokes experienced by males and females of all races.

One in five Americans has high blood pressure. Many of these individuals do not know their blood pressures are higher than normal, and many of those who are aware may experience difficulty managing this silent killer.

The only way to know about your blood pressure is to have it measured regularly. Have blood pressure checks under “normal” conditions, not when you are

- sick or in pain;
- recovering from a heart attack, stroke, or other serious illness or surgery;
- taking over-the-counter cold medicines or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, or Nuprin) unless you take these routinely;
- under unusual stress;
- talking or laughing excitedly;
- upset or anxious (at the hospital, doctor’s, or dentist’s office may not be the best time); or
- exercising or more active than usual.

## Regular blood pressure checks

Adults and children whose family members have never had high blood pressure, heart attacks, or strokes have a much lower chance of having high blood pressure. For those people, many experts recommend blood pressure checks every year.

It is wise to have blood pressure checks more often if

- a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother, or sister has high blood pressure (hypertension) or has had a stroke, heart attack, open-heart bypass surgery, or heart pain called angina;
- you have had a blood pressure measurement of 140/90 or above more than once;
- a doctor has told you that you have hypertension, or you have had a stroke or heart attack;
- you are African American; or
- you are overweight or obese.

If any of these apply to you, it is wise to have a regular plan to check your blood pressure (for example, once each week during several months of the year or twice each day for several months of the year or twice each day for several weeks of each year). Because accuracy is sometimes a problem, have another experienced person occasionally take your blood pressure.

## What do blood pressure numbers mean?

If you have not been diagnosed with hypertension, use the following numbers as guidelines to decide whether you need to see a physician about your blood pressure. People with hypertension should be under the care of a physician.

Systolic (upper number)	
Less than 120	Normal
120–139	Recheck within 2 months; see doctor if it was measured twice with the same results.
140 or higher	Recheck weekly; see doctor if it was measured twice with the same results.
Diastolic (lower number)	
Less than 80	Normal
80–89	Recheck weekly; see doctor if it was measured twice with the same results.
90 or higher	Recheck every day this week; see doctor if it was measured twice with the same results.

Note: If you are an adult, and your blood pressure is 140/90 mm Hg or higher, you have high blood pressure. You should be retested, and if your reading is still high after retesting, you should see a physician.

If you have diabetes or kidney disease, your doctor will want your blood pressure to be lower than 130/80 mm Hg. If you have high blood pressure, you can take steps to control it and reduce your odds of experiencing serious problems.

Here are some ways to control high blood pressure:

- Get regular medical care;
- Check your blood pressure between doctor's appointments;
- Do aerobic exercise to control your weight;
- Use medications wisely.

This information sheet is intended to provide information that will help you become an active partner in your healthcare decisions. You should discuss with your doctor any major changes in your diet or your activity level. In addition, seek as much assistance as needed from a pharmacist, registered dietitian, or nurse to learn the skills of blood pressure control: using medications wisely, taking your own blood pressure, reading food labels, cooking with low-sodium seasonings, watching your weight, and exercising.

Source: American Heart Association and National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Stroke.

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