

Understanding your blood pressure

What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is a measure of the force that your heart uses to pump blood around your body. Changes in blood pressure can be a contributing factor to arrhythmias and with an increase in the use of home blood pressure monitors, patients frequently ask if their blood pressure results are normal, or if they should contact their doctor for follow up. This easy-to-follow guide is designed to give an indication on if and when you should seek further care.

How is blood pressure measured?

Blood pressure readings have two numbers. The higher number is your **systolic pressure** - when your heart beats and pushes blood around the body. The lower number is your **diastolic pressure** - when your heart rests between beats.

Blood pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg). For example, if your blood pressure is "140 over 90" or 140/90mmHg, it means you have a systolic pressure of 140mmHg and a diastolic pressure of 90mmHg.

It can be difficult to get an accurate blood pressure reading when in atrial fibrillation (AF). For this reason, it is advisable to take three readings and take an average from all three.

As a general guide:

- ideal blood pressure is considered to be between 90/60mmHg and 120/80mmHg
- high blood pressure is considered to be 140/90mmHg or higher
- low blood pressure is considered to be 90/60mmHg or lower

NICE (The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) guidelines support the use of the 'WatchBP Home A' device which can also detect atrial fibrillation whilst blood pressure is being measured. The chart below shows the various categories blood pressure can fall into. If either both of, or only one of the two numbers, is either lower or higher than it should be, then your blood pressure may need attention. A high reading may be perfectly normal during stress or exertion but if you suspect that you may have either low or high blood pressure, please seek further advice from your clinician. NICE recommends a 24 hour blood pressure monitor to identify if further treatment is required. Blood tests may also be required to see if your electrolyte balance is correct, or determine if there is an underlying problem.

Treating low blood pressure (Hypotension)

If your doctor feels that there is a treatable underlying cause for your low blood pressure, they will be able to offer the appropriate treatment option for you. The treatment will vary from person to person depending on symptoms and the reasons why the individual may be experiencing hypotension.

Treating high blood pressure (Hypertension)

Changes to your diet and increasing physical activity can help to improve your blood pressure but you may still require medications to lower it further. There are a wide range of blood pressure medications available. Your doctor will be able to advise which medication may be right for you.

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic (Higher number)	Diastolic (Lower number)
Low Blood Pressure	<90	<60
Normal	<120 and	<80
Pre-hypertension	120 - 139 or	80 - 89
High Blood Pressure (Stage 1)	140 - 159 or	90 - 99
High Blood Pressure (Stage 2)	160> or	100>
Hypertensive (Urgent care required)	180>	110>