

DEFLATING THE MYTHS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

There's a common misconception that people with high blood pressure, also called hypertension, will experience symptoms such as nervousness, sweating, difficulty sleeping or facial flushing. The truth is that a person with high blood pressure is largely symptomless. If you ignore your blood pressure because you think symptoms will alert you to the problem, you are taking a dangerous chance with your life. Everybody needs to know their blood pressure numbers, and everyone needs to prevent high blood pressure from developing.

Blood pressure is typically recorded as two numbers, written as a ratio like this:

117
76 mm Hg

Read as "117 over
76 millimeters of
mercury"

Systolic: The top number, which is also the higher of the two numbers, measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats (when the heart muscle contracts).

Diastolic: The bottom number, which is also the lower of the two numbers, measures the pressure in the arteries between heartbeats (when the heart muscle is resting between beats and refilling with blood).

This chart reflects blood pressure categories defined 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