What is a normal blood pressure?

Hypertension raises the risk of heart failure, stroke, kidney damage, vision loss and other problems.

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A normal blood pressure is a systolic pressure (top number) less than 120 and a diastolic pressure (bottom number) less than 80—that is, 120/80 or lower—according to the American Heart Association.

A systolic reading between 120 and 129 with a diastolic number less than 80 is considered elevated blood pressure. A systolic number of 130 to 139 with a diastolic number between 80 and 89 indicates Stage 1 hypertension, while a systolic number of 140 or above with a diastolic number of 90 or higher is Stage 2 hypertension. A reading above 180/120 indicates severe hypertension.

High blood pressure—one of the characteristics of metabolic syndrome—strains the heart and damages blood vessels. Experts estimate that nearly half of American adults have high blood pressure, which is more common among Black people. At early stages, hypertension may have no symptoms. But over time, high blood pressure can lead to heart failure, heart attack, stroke, kidney damage, vision loss, sexual dysfunction, cognitive impairment and pregnancy complications.

Low blood pressure—below 90/60—is a less common concern. Hypotension is usually not harmful unless there are other concerning symptoms, such as fainting, dizziness or unusual fatigue, which can indicate an underlying medical problem.

Management of high blood pressure includes smoking cessation, maintaining a healthy weight, physical activity (especially aerobic exercise) and a healthy diet (including reduced sodium). If these measures are not enough, various types of medication can help keep blood pressure under control.

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