



UNDERSTANDING BLOOD PRESSURE:

Blood pressure is the measurement of force of pressure in the blood vessels during the heart's contraction and rest. With high blood pressure the walls of the arteries become inelastic which causes the heart to work much harder.

High blood pressure is called the "silent killer" because most people have no signs or symptoms. A person who has high BP has no indication of its existence unless it is measured.

The top figure (systolic) measures the force of the blood on the artery walls when the heart beats (e.g. 120 mmHg = *systolic*). The bottom figure (e.g. 80 mmHg = *diastolic*) measures the force of the blood on the artery walls when the heart relaxes. Optimal blood pressure is 120/80 mmHg. A consistent blood pressure of 140/90 mmHg, or higher, is considered to be high blood pressure (hypertension). See the chart below:



BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORIES:		
Category	Systolic blood pressure (mmHg)	Diastolic blood pressure (mmHg)
Grade 3 Hypertension (severe)	> 180	> 110
Grade 2 Hypertension (moderate)	160 -179	100-109
Grade 1 Hypertension (mild)	140 -159	90-99
High-normal blood pressure	130 -139	85-89
Normal blood pressure	< 130	<85
Optimal blood pressure	< 120	<80



Hypertension is a controllable disease that, if not lowered, may require medication for the rest of your life. Here are some steps that can help you to reduce high blood pressure:

- **Follow a healthy diet:** Numerous studies show the health benefits of following a healthy diet to help reduce elevated blood pressure, cholesterol levels and to achieve weight loss.
- **Lose some weight:** Being overweight increases your risk of developing high blood pressure. *Losing even 10 lbs can lower blood pressure* and has the greatest effect for those who are overweight and already have hypertension.
- **Reduce your salt intake:** Choose foods lower in salt and sodium. The current recommendation is to consume less than 6 grams (about one teaspoon) of table salt a day.
- **Increase physical activity:** Being physically active is one of the most important steps you can take to prevent, or control, high blood pressure. Studies show that making even small increases in physical activity can result in large health benefits for the individual concerned. The greatest health gains are achieved when a person goes from being sedentary to moderately active.

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