

Curtis Health proudly presents

HEALTHY HEART MONTH

Understanding Systolic and Diastolic Blood Pressure and Tips for Improving Cardiovascular Health

Blood pressure is a critical indicator of cardiovascular health, measured in two numbers: systolic and diastolic. These figures reflect the force of blood against the walls of your arteries and provide valuable insights into your heart's performance and overall health.

Systolic vs. Diastolic Blood Pressure

The systolic number is the top value in a blood pressure reading. It represents the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats and pumps blood. For instance, in a reading of 120/80 mmHg, 120 is the systolic pressure. This value is particularly significant because it indicates how much pressure your blood exerts on arterial walls during each heartbeat. Elevated systolic pressure (above 130 mmHg) can signal hypertension, which increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, and other complications.



The diastolic number is the bottom value, reflecting the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests between beats. In the same 120/80 reading, 80 is the diastolic pressure. While systolic pressure often garners more attention, diastolic pressure is equally important, especially in younger individuals. High diastolic pressure (above 80 mmHg) may also point to hypertension or other underlying health concerns.

Both values together provide a comprehensive picture of your heart health. A normal blood pressure reading is typically considered to be around 120/80 mmHg, though optimal levels may vary based on individual health factors.

Why Blood Pressure Matters

Consistently high blood pressure (hypertension) forces your heart to work harder, leading to potential damage to the arteries and vital organs like the brain, kidneys, and eyes. Low blood pressure (hypotension), on the other hand, can reduce blood flow to these organs, causing dizziness, fainting, or even shock in severe cases. Maintaining blood pressure within a healthy range is essential to prevent long-term complications and promote overall well-being.



Tips to Improve Cardiovascular Health

1. Adopt a Heart-Healthy Diet

- Focus on whole, nutrient-rich foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
- Limit sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg per day (ideally 1,500 mg for those with hypertension) to prevent fluid retention and pressure build-up in the arteries.

- Avoid excessive consumption of saturated and trans fats, which can raise cholesterol levels and contribute to arterial plaque formation.



2. Exercise Regularly

- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week.
- Activities like walking, cycling, swimming, and dancing strengthen the heart, improve circulation, and help regulate blood pressure.

3. Maintain a Healthy Weight

- Excess weight puts additional strain on the heart and can raise both systolic and diastolic pressures.
- Combining a balanced diet with regular exercise can help achieve and sustain a healthy weight.

4. Manage Stress

- Chronic stress triggers the release of hormones that can increase heart rate and blood pressure.
- Incorporate stress-reducing practices such as mindfulness meditation, deep breathing exercises, or yoga.

5. Limit Alcohol and Avoid Smoking

- Excessive alcohol consumption and smoking are major risk factors for cardiovascular disease.
- Moderating alcohol intake and quitting smoking can significantly improve heart health and blood pressure.

6. Monitor Blood Pressure Regularly

- Regular monitoring helps track progress and detect early signs of hypertension or hypotension.
- Home blood pressure monitors make it easy to keep an eye on your levels between doctor visits.

Conclusion

Understanding the roles of systolic and diastolic blood pressure is essential for maintaining optimal cardiovascular health. By adopting healthy lifestyle habits, you can lower your risk of hypertension and its associated complications. A proactive approach to diet, exercise, stress management, and regular monitoring can pave the way for a healthier, longer life.

