High Blood Pressure: What Do the Numbers Mean?

High blood pressure happens when the force of the blood being pumped through your blood vessels is too strong. It can be normal to have high blood pressure for short periods of time. However, when it stays high for a long time, it can cause several health problems. Most people with high blood pressure don’t have symptoms. In fact, you can have high blood pressure for years and not know it. But even if you don’t show symptoms, high blood pressure still affects your health by harming your blood vessels and heart and increasing your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

There are 2 parts of a blood pressure measurement: your systolic and diastolic pressure. The top or first number is your systolic pressure. This is the pressure of blood pushed through your blood vessels when your heart beats. The second or bottom number is your diastolic pressure. This measures your blood pressure between heartbeats. The following are the general categories for blood pressure measurements:

1. **Normal**: Systolic pressure below 120 mm Hg and diastolic pressure below 80 mm Hg
2. **Elevated**: Systolic pressure between 120 – 129 mm Hg and diastolic pressure below 80 mm Hg
3. **Stage 1**: Systolic pressure between 130 – 139 mm Hg or diastolic pressure between 80 – 89 mm Hg
4. **Stage 2**: Systolic pressure 140 mm Hg or higher or diastolic pressure 90 mm Hg or higher

Blood pressure that is higher than normal usually gets worse over time. Your provider will likely check your blood pressure at each of your appointments. If not, just ask! If your blood pressure is too high, your provider can offer education and ways to treat your blood pressure properly.

You should also monitor your blood pressure at home. Your provider can show you how to use a home blood pressure monitor and verify that it works. Write down the readings and talk about them with your provider.

**Sources**: American Heart Association, Mayo Clinic
Protect Your Heart and Blood Vessels from Harm

Uncontrolled high blood pressure can affect your health in many ways. It can lead to a heart attack, a stroke, an aneurysm (a bulge in a blood vessel that can burst), and heart failure. It can also damage your blood vessels, including those in your kidneys and eyes. The higher your blood pressure and the longer it goes uncontrolled, the greater the damage is.

You can prevent these complications by working to control your blood pressure. An important part of this is seeing your provider regularly.

Sources: American Heart Association (AHA), Mayo Clinic

What Makes Specialists Special?

Your primary care provider will want to see you regularly when you have high blood pressure and may also recommend that you see one or more of the following specialists:

- **A nephrologist or kidney specialist.** High blood pressure is one of the main causes of kidney disease and failure. This is because it damages the blood vessels and filters in your kidneys so they can’t remove waste effectively. A kidney specialist can monitor your kidney health.

- **An ophthalmologist or eye doctor.** High blood pressure can damage the blood vessels in your eyes, leading to vision loss and even blindness. It’s important to have routine eye exams to check for problems, even if you aren’t having problems with your vision.

- **A cardiologist or heart specialist.** High blood pressure can damage your heart and blood vessels. A cardiologist can check your heart and monitor your medications. They can also make sure you have the necessary tests done as needed.

Source: WebMD

Care Coordination and Case Management: We’re Here for You

PrimeWest Health provides Care Coordination and Case Management programs to help keep members healthy. These programs let us work with you and your health care providers to make sure you get the services you need.

Let your care coordinator or case manager know when and how they can help. If you do not know who your care coordinator or case manager is, call one of the following:

- Jennifer at 1-888-588-4420 ext. 5342
- Member Services at 1-866-431-0801
- TTY users call 1-800-627-3529 or 711

These calls are free.

Your Medication Matters—A Lot!

Your provider may prescribe medication to help treat your high blood pressure. You should take it exactly as directed to avoid complications. Don’t stop or change the way you take it without talking to your provider. If your medication causes side effects, you may be able to get a prescription for a different one. Be sure to keep in touch with your provider. Your provider can check to make sure none of your medications interact with each other and can let you know if there are any foods that might interfere with your medication. In short, talk to your provider and take your medication!

Source: Mayo Clinic

Knowledge is Power—Learn More!

Your provider can give you educational information about high blood pressure and can tell you about any support groups in your community. You can also find information online. A good source is the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). You can find specific information on high blood pressure at [www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure](http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure). And, don’t forget that PrimeWest Health care coordinators are great resources. You can get in touch with a care coordinator by calling Member Services at 1-866-431-0801. TTY users call 1-800-627-3529 or 711. These calls are free.
When you are feeling stress, your blood pressure can go up. Over time, blood pressure spikes can damage your blood vessels, heart, and kidneys. This is one reason to try to avoid stress. Another reason is that stress can lead to depression. Depression can alter the way you think, making it hard to focus on taking good care of yourself. Stress and depression can both lead to unhealthy habits like smoking, drug or alcohol misuse, and poor eating.

Alcohol can raise your blood pressure to unhealthy levels. It also contains lots of calories, which can contribute to weight gain, and in turn increase your blood pressure. Because of this, it’s important to limit the amount you drink. As with everything, moderation is key. If you do decide to drink (in moderation!), be sure to check with your provider to see if alcohol will interfere with any medications you take.

Smoking or chewing tobacco also raises your blood pressure. Long-term use can damage the lining of your blood vessels, which can make your blood pressure worse and lead to heart disease.

Nearly all illegal drugs can harm your heart and blood vessels. Stimulants, often called “uppers,” can cause a dramatic increase in blood pressure and can cause a heart attack or stroke. Uppers include cocaine, methamphetamine, and Ecstasy/MDMA.

If you need help to stop drinking, using tobacco, or using drugs, talk to your health care provider. They can help you come up with a plan to quit.

Sources: AHA, Mayo Clinic

Reduce Your Blood Pressure by Reducing Your Weight

Being overweight can affect your blood pressure. Maintaining a healthy weight can help lower your blood pressure. Talk to your provider about what a healthy weight is for you. Then talk about ways you can reach that weight. Your provider will likely recommend exercise and making changes to your diet. This may include decreasing the salt in your diet and increasing foods like fruits and vegetables. Not only can these changes help you lose weight, they can also help control your blood pressure! As you start to lose weight, check in with your provider. The medications you take may need to be adjusted based on your new weight.

Moderation is important when it comes to alcohol consumption, but what does that mean? The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that men not drink more than 2 drinks per day and that women not drink more than 1 drink per day. One drink is defined as a 12-ounce beer, 4 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits.

Sources: AHA, Mayo Clinic

Good Health for Everyone

You’ll need to make lifestyle changes to manage your high blood pressure. This can be hard. That’s why it’s important to have the support of family and friends. As they support you, make sure you support them, too. Let them know that it’s important for them to take care of themselves as well.
Attention. If you need free help interpreting this document, call the above number.

1-866-431-0801 (toll free); TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711
Civil Rights Notice

Discrimination is against the law. PrimeWest Health does not discriminate on the basis of any of the following:

- race
- color
- national origin
- creed
- religion
- sexual orientation
- public assistance status
- age
- disability (including physical or mental impairment)
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
- marital status
- political beliefs
- medical condition
- health status
- receipt of health care services
- claims experience
- medical history
- genetic information

Auxiliary Aids and Services: PrimeWest Health provides auxiliary aids and services, like qualified interpreters or information in accessible formats, free of charge and in a timely manner to ensure an equal opportunity to participate in our health care programs. Contact PrimeWest Health at memberservices@primewest.org, or call Member Services at 1-866-431-0801 (toll free) or TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711.

Language Assistance Services: PrimeWest Health provides translated documents and spoken language interpreting, free of charge and in a timely manner, when language assistance services are necessary to ensure limited English speakers have meaningful access to our information and services. Contact PrimeWest Health at memberservices@primewest.org, or call Member Services at 1-866-431-0801 (toll free) or TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711.

Civil Rights Complaints

You have the right to file a discrimination complaint if you believe you were treated in a discriminatory way by PrimeWest Health. You may contact any of the following four agencies directly to file a discrimination complaint.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Civil Rights (OCR)
You have the right to file a complaint with the OCR, a federal agency, if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:

- race
- color
- national origin
- age
- disability
- sex
- religion (in some cases)
Contact the OCR directly to file a complaint:
Director
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Civil Rights
200 Independence Avenue SW
Room 515F
HHH Building
Washington, DC 20201
Customer Response Center: Toll-free: 800-368-1019
TDD 800-537-7697
Email: ocrmail@hhs.gov

Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR)
In Minnesota, you have the right to file a complaint with the MDHR if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:
- race
- color
- national origin
- religion
- creed
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marital status
- public assistance status
- disability

Contact the MDHR directly to file a complaint:
Minnesota Department of Human Rights
540 Fairview Avenue North
Suite 201
St. Paul, MN 55104
651-539-1100 (voice)
800-657-3704 (toll free)
711 or 800-627-3529 (MN Relay)
651-296-9042 (fax)
Info.MDHR@state.mn.us (email)

Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
You have the right to file a complaint with DHS if you believe you have been discriminated against in our health care programs because of any of the following:
- race
- color
- national origin
- creed
- religion
- sexual orientation
- public assistance status
- age
- disability (including physical or mental impairment)
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
- marital status
- political beliefs
- medical condition
- health status
- receipt of health care services
- claims experience
- medical history
- genetic information

Complaints must be in writing and filed within 180 days of the date you discovered the alleged discrimination. The complaint must contain your name and address and describe the discrimination you are complaining about. After we get your complaint, we will review it and notify you in writing about whether we have authority to investigate. If we do, we will investigate the complaint.
DHS will notify you in writing of the investigation’s outcome. You have the right to appeal the outcome if you disagree with the decision. To appeal, you must send a written request to have DHS review the investigation outcome. Be brief and state why you disagree with the decision. Include additional information you think is important.

If you file a complaint in this way, the people who work for the agency named in the complaint cannot retaliate against you. This means they cannot punish you in any way for filing a complaint. Filing a complaint in this way does not stop you from seeking out other legal or administrative actions.

Contact DHS directly to file a discrimination complaint:
Civil Rights Coordinator
Minnesota Department of Human Services
Equal Opportunity and Access Division
P.O. Box 64997
St. Paul, MN 55164-0997
651-431-3040 (voice) or use your preferred relay service

PrimeWest Health Complaint Notice
You have the right to file a complaint with PrimeWest Health if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:

- medical condition
- disability (including mental or physical impairment)
- national origin
- health status
- marital status
- race
- receipt of health care services
- age
- color
- marital status
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
- religion
- claims experience
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
- creed
- medical history
- sexual orientation
- public assistance status
- genetic information
- political beliefs
- prime assistance status
- American Indian Health Statement
American Indians can continue or begin to use tribal and Indian Health Services (IHS) clinics. We will not require prior approval or impose any conditions for you to get services at these clinics. For elders age 65 years and older this includes Elderly Waiver (EW) services accessed through the tribe. If a doctor or other provider in a tribal or IHS clinic refers you to a provider in our network, we will not require you to see your primary care provider prior to the referral.