Boulder Community Health

PATIENT EDUCATION

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

Patient Information	
Your circulatory (blood) system and blood pressure	• The circulatory system includes your heart that pumps blood and oxygen, and the vessels that carry the blood and oxygen to your whole body. • Arteries are the vessels that carry blood and oxygen from your heart to your body. • Veins are the vessels that carry blood from your body, back to your heart and lungs to get more oxygen. • When your heart beats, it creates pressure on the walls of your arteries and veins; this is blood pressure. • Healthy arteries are made of muscle and tissue that stretches when the heart pumps blood through them. The more forcefully the heart pumps, the more they stretch to allow blood to flow easily. • Over time, if the force of the blood flow is often high, the walls of the arteries get damaged.
Blood pressure numbers	• Blood pressure is measured in two pressures called systolic and diastolic. It is usually written like this: 120/80. • The number on top is the systolic pressure and refers to the pressure when the heart beats and pumps blood into the arteries and veins. • The number on the bottom is the diastolic pressure and refers to blood pressure when the heart is at rest between beats. • Blood pressure doesn't stay the same all the time. It lowers as you sleep and rises when you wake up. Blood pressure also rises when you are excited, nervous, exercising, or talking. • If your blood pressure numbers stay above normal most of the time, you are at risk for health problems. As the numbers get higher, so do the problems. • A normal blood pressure is less than 120/80.
Risk factors for high blood pressure	• Increased age (men over 45 and women over 65) • Being African American • Eating food with a lot of salt • A family history • Being overweight • Not getting enough exercise • Smoking • Drinking too much alcohol • Stress • Having low vitamin D • Not eating enough potassium • Chronic kidney disease • Sleep apnea

For more information about your blood pressure, please speak to your doctor or nurse.

Last reviewed: 10/2025