



Important health checks – blood pressure

Blood pressure

Blood pressure is a measure of how much pressure there is in your arteries and veins. Think of it like your garden hose – if it is on gently there is little pressure on the hose and you can water the garden easily. If however, you have the tap on full throttle, the hose becomes taut and not as flexible. You can even worry that the hose will come loose from the actual tap! Imagine doing this to your arteries, veins and everything else in between!! Long periods of high blood pressure can do damage to your arteries and veins putting you at risk of cardiovascular disease such as heart attack, heart disease, stroke and as well as renal (that's kidney) disease.

Blood pressure comes as a reading such as 120/80. The top reading looks at how much pressure there is sending the blood from your heart to your body (called Systolic) and the bottom number measures how much pressure there is in your veins as the blood returns to your heart (called Diastolic). A healthy reading is 120/80 but this can vary almost immediately with a stress, a fright or an emotional event. Below are the National Heart Foundation's guidelines on blood pressure:

Level of risk	Systolic (mmHg)	Diastolic (mmHg)
Normal	< 120	< 80
High-normal	120–139	80–89
Grade 1 (mild) hypertension	140–159	90–99
Grade 2 (moderate) hypertension	160–179	100–109
Grade 3 (severe) hypertension	≥ 180	≥ 110

Source: 2008 National Heart Foundation Hypertension Management guidelines