

# Blood Pressure and Heart Failure

## ***What Are the Effects of High Blood Pressure?***

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a common cause of heart failure, heart attacks, and stroke. As blood pressure goes up, the heart has to work harder to pump blood through the body and the heart can eventually fail. Blood pressure must be controlled to prevent the heart from becoming overworked and failing.

## ***What Causes Low Blood Pressure?***

Medications taken to treat heart failure help your heart and lower your blood pressure. Sometimes these medicines can cause your blood pressure to go too low and can make you weak or dizzy.

Often, blood pressure levels get too low at some point during your treatment for heart failure. If this happens, your doctor will adjust the amount of medicine you take.

## ***How Is Blood Pressure Reported?***

Blood pressure is reported as two numbers.

- The first number is the pressure while the heart is squeezing. This is called systolic (sis TOL ik) blood pressure.
- The second number is the pressure while the heart is relaxing. This is called diastolic (di a STOL ik) blood pressure.

Blood pressure is usually written with the systolic blood pressure first, followed by a slash, then the diastolic blood pressure. An example is 134/76. A blood pressure reading of more than 140/90 is generally considered high blood pressure.

***How Is Blood Pressure Reported? continued***

There is no number that identifies your blood pressure as too low. If you are being treated with heart failure medicines, at times your systolic number may be as low as 90.

Signs that your blood pressure is too low are dizziness, weakness, and the inability to exercise. These symptoms mean that too little blood is reaching your head, muscles, or other vital organs.

In general, the best blood pressure for your heart when you have heart failure is below 140/90, but not so low that you cannot stand, walk, and exercise without feeling weak or dizzy.

***When Should You Take Your Blood Pressure?***

Blood pressure changes from minute to minute and according to the body's position. Blood pressure goes down when you go from lying down to sitting or standing up.

Because your blood pressure changes so often, you should check your blood pressure at home and at different times of the day. You should do this especially if you have high blood pressure or heart failure. A blood pressure test is also useful if you are having trouble with lightheadedness or dizziness after you stand.

Your blood pressure should be measured both when you are sitting comfortably and after you have been standing up for a few minutes.

You or someone you know should learn how to take your blood pressure. Most drug stores sell the equipment, and your doctor's office can help you learn how to use it.

**What Should You Do with Your Blood Pressure Measurements?**

Keep track of your blood pressure while you are being treated for heart failure. If you get the measurements at home or in the drug store, take them with you to the doctor. Also let your doctor know immediately if your heart failure medicine is making you feel weak or dizzy.

**Glossary**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Systolic</b>	sis TOL ik	The pressure when the heart is squeezing (contracting)
<b>Diastolic</b>	di a STOL ik	The pressure when the heart is relaxing