

[IMAGE]

"High-Normal" Blood Pressure Not Normal

Blood pressure (BP) is generated when blood is pumped through your body, which exerts force against the inside walls of your blood vessels. It is measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) - how high the pressure can raise a column of mercury, and is based on two numbers: systolic (pumping heart) and diastolic (between pumps) BP.

"High-normal" BP, defined as a systolic pressure of 130 to 139 mm Hg and/or a diastolic pressure of 85 to 89 mm Hg, has long been considered a safe range. Yet studies have shown that very high BP is related to a higher risk for cardiovascular disease. The authors of a recent study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* asked the question: Are those with high-normal BP also more likely to develop cardiovascular disease?

The authors examined data on nearly 7,000 adults in the Framingham Heart Study. For the study, initial BP and cardiovascular disease rates 12 years later were considered. The results for those with high-normal BP are listed below:

Women were 2.5 times more likely and men were 1.6 times more likely to have heart disease than those with optimal BP. Four percent of women and 8% of men ages 35 to 65 with high-normal BP had some form of heart disease, and older individuals with high-normal BP were even more likely to have heart disease. A quarter of those studied had high-normal BP.

If your BP falls within the high-normal range, you may not be safe from cardiovascular disease. Have your BP checked regularly, and be sure it falls within "normal" levels, especially if you are elderly or diabetic.

Reference:

Vasan RS, Larson MG, Leip EP, et al. Impact of high-normal blood pressure on the risk of cardiovascular disease. *The New England Journal of Medicine* 2001;345(18), pp. 1291-1297.

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