CONDITION

Low blood pressure

Low blood pressure means blood flows through your arteries at a pressure that may be too low to meet your body's needs.

WHAT IT IS
Blood pressure too low for adequate blood flow

BODY SYSTEM
Heart and circulation

MAIN SYMPTOMS
Dizziness, fainting, blurred vision, weakness

WHAT CAUSES IT
Dehydration, medicines, blood loss, pregnancy, or health conditions

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED
Repeated blood pressure and standing measurements

MAIN TREATMENT
Treating the cause and reducing symptoms

CAN IT BE CURED?
Sometimes - reversible causes can be corrected

IS IT AN EMERGENCY?
Sometimes - fainting or shock signs

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK
Often manageable; chronic forms may persist

Overview

Low blood pressure, also called hypotension, means the pressure of blood in your arteries is lower than expected. Some people naturally have low readings and feel well. For others, a sudden fall or persistently low pressure can cause symptoms because the brain and other organs receive less blood.

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers. The upper number is systolic pressure, measured when the heart contracts. The lower number is diastolic pressure, measured when the heart relaxes between beats.

A reading below 90/60 millimetres of mercury is often described as low blood pressure. However, the number alone does not show whether there is a problem. Your usual blood pressure, symptoms, medicines, health conditions, and changes over time all matter.

Low blood pressure is especially important when it causes fainting, falls, confusion, or signs of shock. A small number of people have severe hypotension because of major blood loss, serious infection, a severe allergic reaction, or a heart problem. These situations require emergency care.

Symptoms

Low blood pressure may cause no symptoms. When symptoms occur, they often appear after standing up, during hot weather, after a meal, or when you are dehydrated.

Possible symptoms include:

Orthostatic hypotension, also called postural hypotension, is a fall in blood pressure after standing. Symptoms usually develop within a few minutes of getting up from sitting or lying down. They may improve when you sit or lie down again.

Low blood pressure after eating is called postprandial hypotension. It is more common in older adults and in people with certain conditions affecting the nervous system.

Severe hypotension can lead to shock, meaning vital organs are not receiving enough blood. Signs can include cold or sweaty skin, rapid shallow breathing, a weak or rapid pulse, marked confusion, or loss of consciousness.

- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Fainting or feeling close to fainting
- Blurred, dimmed, or tunnel-like vision
- Weakness or unusual tiredness
- Nausea
- Trouble concentrating or confusion
- Unsteadiness and falls
- A fast, pounding, or irregular heartbeat

Causes and risk factors

Blood pressure can fall when there is less fluid in the bloodstream, the heart cannot pump effectively, blood vessels become too wide, or the nervous system does not adjust circulation properly.

Common or important causes include:

Blood pressure normally changes through the day. It can fall during sleep, after exercise, or when you stand. Older adults may be more likely to develop orthostatic hypotension because blood vessels and reflexes that control pressure can become less responsive with age.

Alcohol, hot environments, and large meals may worsen symptoms in some people. Having naturally low blood pressure is not itself an illness if it does not cause symptoms or result from another problem.

- Dehydration from vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, heat, or not drinking enough
- Blood loss, including internal bleeding
- Medicines for high blood pressure, heart conditions, depression, anxiety, or Parkinson's disease
- Pregnancy, especially during the earlier stages
- Heart rhythm problems, heart valve disease, heart failure, or a heart attack
- Hormone conditions involving the thyroid or adrenal glands
- Diabetes or other conditions that damage nerves controlling blood pressure
- Severe infection
- A severe allergic reaction
- Long periods of bed rest

Diagnosis

Low blood pressure is confirmed with blood pressure measurements. A clinician may repeat the reading after you have rested and check that the cuff is the correct size.

If symptoms happen after standing, your pressure and pulse may be measured while you are lying down and again after you stand. A fall of at least 20 millimetres of mercury in systolic pressure or 10 millimetres of mercury in diastolic pressure within three minutes can support a diagnosis of orthostatic hypotension.

You may be asked about when symptoms happen, whether you have fainted, how much fluid you drink, and whether you have recently been ill. A review of prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, and supplements is important. Do not stop prescribed medicine without medical advice.

Tests are chosen according to the possible cause. They may include:

Home blood pressure readings can show patterns, but they do not identify the cause. Record the reading, your position, your symptoms, and what you were doing at the time. Bring the monitor to an appointment if there are concerns about its accuracy.

- Blood tests for anaemia, blood sugar, salts, kidney function, or hormone problems
- An electrocardiogram to check the heart's rate and rhythm
- Longer heart rhythm monitoring if symptoms come and go
- An echocardiogram, which uses sound waves to examine the heart
- A tilt-table test to monitor pressure and pulse while your position changes

Treatment and management

Low blood pressure without symptoms may not need treatment. When treatment is needed, the aim is usually to correct the cause and reduce dizziness, fainting, and falls rather than reach one standard blood pressure number.

If a medicine is contributing, a clinician may adjust the dose, timing, or type of medicine. This should be done carefully because the medicine may be controlling another important condition.

Depending on the cause, management may include:

Some people are advised to increase salt, but this is not safe for everyone. Extra salt can worsen high blood pressure, heart failure, kidney disease, or fluid retention. Ask a clinician before making a major change.

Prescription medicines that raise blood pressure or help the body retain fluid may be considered for persistent orthostatic hypotension. They require monitoring because they can cause unwanted effects, including high blood pressure while lying down.

Emergency treatment for severe hypotension may involve intravenous fluids, blood transfusion, antibiotics, allergy treatment, or care for a heart problem. The treatment is based on the underlying cause.

- Drinking enough fluid if this is safe for you
- Getting up slowly and pausing before walking
- Sitting or lying down promptly when symptoms begin
- Avoiding long periods of standing
- Limiting alcohol if it worsens symptoms

- Using smaller meals if pressure falls after eating
- Wearing compression garments to reduce blood pooling in the legs or abdomen
- Learning muscle-tensing movements for warning symptoms

Complications

Dizziness and fainting can lead to falls, fractures, head injuries, or road accidents. Recurrent symptoms may also make it difficult to work, exercise, shop, or stand for long periods.

When blood pressure is extremely low, the brain, heart, kidneys, and other organs may not receive enough oxygen-rich blood. Prolonged severe hypotension can cause organ injury. This is mainly a concern in shock or another serious acute illness, not in someone who normally has a low reading and feels well.

Repeated fainting should be assessed even if recovery is quick. Fainting can have causes other than low blood pressure, including abnormal heart rhythms.

Prevention

Low blood pressure cannot always be prevented. It may result from pregnancy, an inherited tendency, ageing, a long-term nervous system condition, or medicine needed for another illness.

You may be able to prevent some episodes by drinking regularly, avoiding sudden position changes, and taking care during hot weather. Replace fluids after vomiting, diarrhoea, or heavy sweating when you can do so safely.

If you become dizzy on standing, move your feet and legs before getting up. Sit on the edge of the bed for a short time, then stand with support nearby. Avoid driving or using machinery when you feel faint.

Regular movement can help circulation, but exercise plans may need adjusting if symptoms are frequent. Do not deliberately increase salt, stop medicine, or greatly increase fluid intake without advice if you have heart, kidney, or blood pressure problems.

Living with it and what to expect

The course depends on the cause. Low pressure from dehydration, a short illness, blood loss, or a medicine may improve once the cause is corrected. Blood pressure during pregnancy

often changes again after birth.

Chronic orthostatic hypotension may continue for months or years. Symptoms can fluctuate with heat, illness, meals, activity, hydration, and medicine changes. Management often focuses on recognising triggers, preventing falls, and making daily activities safer.

Keep a record if episodes are difficult to predict. Note your symptoms, blood pressure if available, body position, meals, fluid intake, and recent medicine changes. This can help reveal a pattern.

Routine follow-up may include reviewing medicines, checking lying and standing blood pressure, and monitoring any underlying heart, hormone, or nervous system condition. Tell your clinician about falls, fainting, or changes in your ability to manage daily tasks.

Many people with naturally low blood pressure need no restrictions. Those with persistent symptoms may need practical adjustments, but symptoms can often be reduced even when the underlying condition remains.

When to get medical help

Call emergency services if low blood pressure or fainting occurs with:

Seek urgent medical advice for repeated fainting, severe dizziness that prevents standing, new confusion, or dehydration when you cannot keep fluids down. New symptoms after starting or changing medicine also need prompt review.

Arrange a routine appointment if dizziness keeps returning, you have had unexplained falls, or symptoms interfere with daily life. Consistently low readings without symptoms are usually less urgent, but they are worth discussing if they are new or you take medicines that affect blood pressure.

- Chest pain, severe breathlessness, or a very abnormal heartbeat
- Signs of a stroke, such as facial weakness, arm weakness, or speech trouble
- Heavy bleeding, vomiting blood, or black, tar-like stools
- A severe allergic reaction, especially swelling or breathing difficulty
- Cold or clammy skin, rapid breathing, marked confusion, or a weak rapid pulse
- Loss of consciousness without quick recovery
- A serious injury after fainting

Common questions

Is 90/60 blood pressure too low?

A reading below 90/60 is commonly described as low, but it is not automatically dangerous. Some healthy people normally have readings around this level. Symptoms, sudden changes, and the underlying cause are more important than one number.

Can low blood pressure make me tired?

Yes. It can cause weakness, fatigue, poor concentration, or a washed-out feeling. These symptoms also have many other possible causes, so persistent tiredness should not be assumed to come from blood pressure alone.

What should I do if I suddenly feel dizzy?

Sit or lie down to reduce the risk of falling. If possible, raise your legs. Get up again slowly only after the feeling has passed. Seek help if the dizziness is severe, keeps returning, or comes with emergency symptoms.

Does eating more salt help low blood pressure?

Salt can raise blood pressure in some people, but increasing it is not safe for everyone. It may worsen heart failure, kidney disease, fluid retention, or high blood pressure while lying down. Make substantial changes only after medical advice.

Can medicines cause low blood pressure?

Yes. Several types of medicine can lower pressure or make it fall on standing. The risk may increase when medicines are combined or during dehydration. Do not stop a prescribed medicine on your own; ask for a medication review.

Is low blood pressure dangerous?

It is often harmless when it causes no symptoms. It becomes more concerning when it leads to fainting, falls, confusion, or reduced blood flow to vital organs. A sudden severe fall caused by bleeding, infection, allergy, or a heart problem can be an emergency.

Sources

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- 2018 European Society of Cardiology guidelines for the diagnosis and management of syncope , Brignole M, Moya A, de Lange FJ, and colleagues, European Heart Journal , 2018;39:1883-1948