Higher Blood Pressure OK for Some Older Folks? Experts Say Yes.

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If you're older than age 60 and have high blood pressure, you might want to check with your doctor about a recent update for managing the condition. That's because according to new research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, a committee of experts determined it's OK for older folks to have a higher blood pressure reading, CNN reports.

The group of 17 hypertension experts said they now believe that the initial, systolic component of a blood pressure (BP) reading—the top number—can be about 10 points higher than was previously considered the gold standard.

In the past, most doctors aimed to keep a patient's blood pressure below 140 for the systolic reading and 90 for the diastolic—the bottom number. But after combing through mountains of data from the past 30 years, experts found that the systolic number can actually be higher, especially for older folks who can remain healthy with a 150/90 reading.

Experts predicted the guidelines will affect millions of people currently being treated for high blood pressure who may now be able to go off their medications. (Hypertension is usually controlled by combining a healthy diet with medication to ward off strokes, heart attack, kidney failure and death if the illness is left untreated.)

But the experts stressed that these guidelines only apply to people 60 and older. "There is insufficient evidence in hypertensive persons younger than 60 years for a systolic goal, or in those younger than 30 years for a diastolic goal," experts stated in the report. "The panel [still] recommends a BP of less than 140/90 for those groups."

Studies show 9 out of 10 African Americans with hypertension develop early heart disease. For more information, click here.

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