THE BRITISH WHEEL OF YOGA QUALIFICATIONS

# TY 2.2-A Yoga and Blood Pressure

MINDBODY WELLNESS Professional Skills Training

BWYQ Recognised Centre

**What Is Blood Pressure?**

Blood pressure (BP) is the force of blood pushing against the artery walls as the heart pumps.

It's recorded as two numbers:

- Systolic (top) — the amount of pressure on the artery walls when the heart pumps blood.
- Diastolic (bottom) — the amount of pressure on the artery walls when the heart is relaxed

It is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg).

**UK Blood Pressure Guidelines (UK)**

Current UK blood pressure categories (as defined by NICE) based on typical readings taken at a clinic are:

| Category | Systolic (mmHg) | Diastolic (mmHg) |
|---|---|---|
| **Low** | < 90 | < 60 |
| **Optimal range** | 90–119 | 60–79 |
| **Elevated / High-Normal** | 120–139 | 80 - 89 |
| **Stage 1 Hypertension** | 140–159 | 90–99 |
| **Stage 2 Hypertension** | 160–179 | 100-119 |
| **Hypertensive Crisis** | ≥ 180 | ≥ 120 |

Note that the threshold for Stage 1 hypertension is lower in America: 130/80.

Be aware that a range of modifiable and non-modifiable factors can impact upon blood pressure including age, ethnicity, genetics and lifestyle.

It only takes one of the numbers, either the systolic or diastolic reading, to be outside the normal range for the whole reading to be considered outside the normal range.

**Readings Outside of the Normal Range**

***High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)***

High blood pressure can often be symptomless. When symptoms do occur, they may include:

- Headaches, blurred vision
- Shortness of breath
- Possible chest pain

***Low Blood Pressure (Hypotension)***

Symptoms can include:

- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Feeling sick
- Blurred vision
- Weakness, confusion
- Fainting, especially when standing quickly (postural hypotension)

**Why Blood Pressure Matters in Yoga**

Blood pressure outside the normal range presents risks during yoga practice:

*Uncontrolled High Blood Pressure Risks*

In a nutshell, consistently high blood pressure makes the heart work harder, putting strain on the heart and blood vessels.

Certain yoga practices may temporarily increase blood pressure, for example inversions and holding the breath, which can be problematic if blood pressure is already high.

*Low Blood Pressure Risks*

Rapid position changes such as going from lying to standing can cause dizziness or fainting.

Poor circulation and light-headedness may occur with extended holds.

**How Yoga Can Influence Blood Pressure**

Research shows yoga -asana, pranayama and meditation - may contribute towards lowering high blood pressure in the long term when practiced regularly. A review of 17 research trials by Hagins et al in 2013 found that, 'yoga was associated with a small but significant decline in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure.'

A study by Rajeswari et al in 2024 compared heart rate and blood pressure between a group who practiced a 30 minute yoga protocol (Surya Namaskara, Nadi Shodhana and Savasana) with a control group who read quietly for 30 minutes. They found a statistically significant reduction in both heart rate and blood pressure in the yoga group and with no significant variation in the control group. This led to the conclusion that 'even a single brief yoga session can induce clinically meaningful improvements in heart rate and blood pressure, likely through autonomic nervous system modulation.'

Possible mechanisms for reducing blood pressure include:

- Stress reduction and balancing the nervous system.
- Improved circulation and vascular flexibility.
- Consciously changing your breathing pattern to one that promotes relaxation.

***Important Reminder: Yoga is complementary, not a replacement for medical treatment or lifestyle changes prescribed by a medical professional.***

**Class Modifications and Safety Guidelines**

*General Safety Principles*

Before class:

- Check if there are any issues *before* practice begins.
- Encourage people with diagnosed hypertension or hypotension to inform their GP before starting yoga.
- Students with uncontrolled hypertension should avoid practice and see their GP.

**Possible Modifications for Hypertension**

Emphasise slow transitions, calming breath and mindfulness.

Avoid or modify:

- Inversions or deep forward bends that place the head below the heart.
- Forceful breathwork such as those involving rapid inhalations/exhalations or breath retention (Kumbhaka).
- Long holds or strenuous sequences that spike exertion, including raising the arms above the head.
- Hot or strenuous practice such as hot yoga or strong Vinyasa without adaptation.

Incorporate:

- Calming pranayama - slow, even breathing and guided exhalations.
- Relaxation and meditation practices.
- Use of props to support stability and decrease strain.

**Possible Modifications for Low Blood Pressure**

For hypotensive students:

- Ensure gradual transitions - especially supine to standing.
- Keep head at or above heart level whenever feasible.
- Avoid sudden upright strong backbends or fast changes that might provoke dizziness.
- Encourage students to stay hydrated and emphasise that they can rest in a seated or reclined supported position if needed.
- Emphasise slower breathing and relaxation.

**References**

Hagins, M., States, R., Selfe, T., & Innes, K. (2013). 'Effectiveness of yoga for hypertension: systematic review and meta-analysis'. *Evidence-based complementary and alternative medicine : eCAM*, *2013*, 649836. https://doi.org/10.1155/2013/649836 [Accessed 26/02/2026].

Rajaswari, P., Madhuri, S., and Rajani, R., (2024) 'Effect of Yoga on Resting Heart Rate and Blood Pressure: A Controlled Physiological Study'. *European Journal of cardiovascular Medicine,* Volume 14 Issue:1 (Jan-Feb, 2024) | Pages 1198 – 1204 [Accessed 26/02/2026].