

Are higher blood pressure targets appropriate for older adults?

Clinical Question	Should blood pressure targets be increased for older adults?
Bottom Line	Lower BP targets (<140 mmHg) show little to no difference in all-cause death but reduce stroke, serious cardiovascular events, cardiovascular mortality, and may reduce congestive heart failure exacerbations and myocardial infarctions/acute coronary syndrome comparative to higher targets (<150-160 mmHg). Absolute risk reductions are small, preventing 10 serious cardiovascular events per 1000 participants over three years. Lower BP targets likely do not increase withdrawals due to adverse effects.
Caveat	Although the study participants were from general practice populations, they appeared to have either lower or higher cardiovascular risk than expected. Data was not available to compare BP targets in older adults by cardiovascular risk and multi-morbidity. Since all the studies were conducted in Japan or China, this limits generalizability. Adverse event reporting was poor, with serious adverse events reported in only one trial. Adults older than 80 were not well represented, and it is unclear how BP targets affect non-cardiovascular outcomes, such as falls, fractures, or the ability to live independently.
Context	Hypertension is a common condition leading to higher cardiovascular morbidity and mortality. Lowering BP with antihypertensive medication reduces these risks. Historically, the target BP for treatment was <140/90 mmHg, but this varies by patient population. For adults over 65, the optimal BP target is unclear. BP-lowering medications are tailored to individual readings, which can be obtained through various methods. Guidelines differ on BP targets for older adults, ranging from <130 mmHg to <150 mmHg. Specific mechanisms in older adults, such as arterial stiffness, affect BP management and it is still debated as to whether less aggressive BP targets may be beneficial.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Falk JM, Froentjes L, Kirkwood JEM, Heran BS, Kolber MR, Allan GM, Korownyk CS, Garrison SR. Higher blood pressure targets for hypertension in older adults. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2024, Issue 12. Art. No.: CD011575. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD011575.pub3. This review contains 4 trials which included 16,732 older adults.

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD011575.pub3/full>