

Taking your blood pressure at home

Measuring your blood pressure at home can help your doctor to diagnose and prevent health problems. Your doctor may want to know whether lifestyle changes you are making are lowering your blood pressure. If you are already taking blood pressure medicine, monitoring your blood pressure at home can help you see if the medicine is working. Or, your doctor may want to see if your blood pressure is lower (or higher) at home than in the doctor's office. Home monitoring can also help you remember to take your medicine. Even if you measure your blood pressure at home, you must still see your doctor regularly.

Understand blood pressure measurement

Normal blood pressure levels are less than 130/85 mm Hg. If yours is higher than this, you may have high blood pressure (hypertension). The upper number is the systolic pressure. This means the pressure your heart uses to pump blood with each beat. The lower number is diastolic pressure. It means the pressure in your arteries in between beats. The "mm Hg" means "millimeters of mercury."

Learn how to use your monitor

Read the instructions that come with your monitor, and ask your doctor to show you how to use it. Compare the readings with those taken at the same time from your doctor's monitor to see if you are taking your blood pressure the right way.

Make sure you purchase a monitor with the right size cuff for you. If you use a cuff that is too small, the reading may be too high. Measure around your upper arm with a tape measure at the midpoint between the tip of your shoulder and the elbow. Write down the number of inches, and compare it to the cuff measurements in the store. Cuffs come in small, medium, and large sizes. The large size is hard to find, so you may have to ask your pharmacist to order one. Keep in mind that even people who are of average weight may need a large size. Make sure that you put the cuff—and the sensor—at the right place on your arm.

Establish a schedule

Your doctor will tell you how often you should check your blood pressure. Record the measurement on a chart, or use the memory function that is included with some monitors. One good plan may be to take 3 readings, twice a day, for 2 weeks. Another strategy is to check your blood pressure only once a day, before you take your medication. If your blood pressure is well-controlled, you may need to check it only a few times a week.

Your monitoring plan

I will measure my blood pressure _____ times per day.

I will measure my blood pressure at these times _____.

I will measure my blood pressure _____ times per week.

Aim for accuracy

To get the best blood pressure readings, follow these tips:

- Avoid caffeine and smoking for 30 minutes before taking your blood pressure.
- Relax for 5 minutes first.
- Use the same arm each time. Sit in a chair with a back, with your arm resting on a desk or table in front of you at the level of your heart. If your arm is higher or lower than your heart, the readings will be too low or too high.
- Take the readings at the same time each day.

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