

High Blood Pressure: Checking Your Blood Pressure at Home

Table of Contents

- High Blood Pressure: Checking Your Blood Pressure at Home

Overview

When blood pressure is high, it starts to damage the blood vessels, heart, and kidneys. This can lead to heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, and other problems. But if you don't measure your blood pressure, you won't know when it's high, because there are usually no symptoms.

A home blood pressure monitor makes it easy to keep track of your blood pressure.

Checking your blood pressure at home helps you work with your doctor to diagnose and manage your blood pressure. Checking it at home does not replace having it checked by your doctor.

How to take your blood pressure at home

Choosing a blood pressure monitor

An automatic blood pressure monitor is recommended. These monitors are easy to use. They do the measuring for you. Try to choose a monitor that has been validated to give accurate readings.¹ Contact your doctor if you want help choosing a monitor.

A monitor that measures blood pressure in your arm is recommended for most people. Blood pressure monitors used on the wrist aren't as reliable as those that use arm cuffs. Wrist monitors should be used only by people who can't use arm cuffs for physical reasons. And devices that use finger monitors aren't recommended at all.

The size of the blood pressure cuff and where you place it can greatly affect how accurate your device is. If the cuff is too small or too large, the results won't be right. You may have to measure your arm and choose a monitor that comes in the right size.

If you can, try to choose a monitor that saves the blood pressure readings. You may want to choose one that can print your results or send them directly to your doctor.

When you first get a blood pressure device, check its accuracy. Do this by comparing its readings with those you get at the doctor's office. Ask your doctor or nurse to watch you use your device to make sure that you are doing it right and that it works right. It's a good idea to have your device checked every year at the doctor's office.

Using a blood pressure monitor at home

Before you take your blood pressure:

- Don't drink caffeine, smoke, or exercise for at least 30 minutes before you take your blood pressure.
- Empty your bladder before the test.
- Sit with your back straight, such as on a dining chair, with both feet on the floor.
- Rest quietly for at least 5 minutes before you take a reading.
- Do not move, talk, or text while you take your blood pressure.

Take your blood pressure twice a day if your doctor recommends it. Take it in the morning and evening. Here are the steps.

1. Sit with your arm slightly bent and resting comfortably on a table so that your upper arm is on the same level as your heart.
Use the same arm each time you take your blood pressure.
2. Wrap the blood pressure cuff around your bare upper arm.
The lower edge of the cuff should be about 1 inch (2.5 cm) above the bend of your elbow.
3. Press the on/off button.
You may need to wait until the screen says the monitor is ready.
4. Press the start button.
The cuff will inflate.
5. After a few seconds, the cuff will begin to deflate.
The numbers on the screen will begin to drop.
6. The monitor shows your blood pressure.
If your monitor does not automatically save your blood pressure numbers, write them down along with the date and time.
7. Wait one minute and take your blood pressure again.

Keep a blood pressure diary if your doctor recommends it. Your records may help explain changes in your blood pressure readings and help your doctor make sure you get the right treatment.

Check your blood pressure cuff often. Make sure all of the parts of your monitor are in good condition. Even a small hole or crack in the tubing can lead to inaccurate results.

Keeping a blood pressure diary

You can use a home blood pressure log or a spreadsheet on your computer to record your blood pressure numbers with the date and time. The blood pressure monitor you use at home might have a feature that will record your numbers for you. Some monitors can transfer this information to your computer.

Also record your daily activities, such as the time you take medicine or if you feel upset or feel stressed.

Everyone's blood pressure changes from day to day and even from minute to minute sometimes. Blood pressure tends to be higher in the morning and lower at night. Stress, smoking, eating, exercise, cold, pain, noise, medicines, and even talking can affect it.

Related Information

- Home Blood Pressure Log

References

Citations

1. American Medical Association (2020). U.S. blood pressure validated device listing. *Validated Device Listing (VDL)*. <https://www.validatebp.org>. Accessed October 9, 2020.

Credits

Current as of: June 24, 2023

Author: Healthwise Staff

Clinical Review Board

All Healthwise education is reviewed by a team that includes physicians, nurses, advanced practitioners, registered dietitians, and other healthcare professionals.

Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.



This information does not replace the advice of a doctor. Healthwise, Incorporated, disclaims any warranty or liability for your use of this information.

© 1995-2024 Healthwise, Incorporated. Healthwise, Healthwise for every health decision, and the Healthwise logo are trademarks of Healthwise, Incorporated.