

Healthy Living: Monitoring Your Blood Pressure at Home¹

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Do you think your blood pressure may be too high? Have you been diagnosed with high blood pressure (called hypertension)? In either case, you should monitor your blood pressure at home and get it checked at the doctor's office. This can help your doctor determine if you have high blood pressure or if your treatment plan is working. Read on to learn how to monitor your blood pressure at home.



Figure 1. Regularly taking your blood pressure at home will help you and your health care provider keep track of your readings, and help to guide your treatment plan.

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How to Check

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends an approved automatic cuff-style upper arm monitor to check

your blood pressure (AHA, 2012a). Follow these AHA guidelines to ensure an accurate reading (AHA, 2012b):

1. Make sure the cuff fits.
2. Don't smoke, drink caffeinated beverages, or exercise within 30 minutes of measuring blood pressure.
3. Sit with your back straight and supported.
4. Place your feet flat on the floor.
5. Support your arm on a flat surface such as a table with your upper arm at heart level.
6. Wrap the cuff around your upper arm.
7. Take two or three readings one minute apart and record all results.
8. Take readings at the same time each day.

What Do the Numbers Mean?

You may notice that your blood pressure varies throughout the day. This is normal and why you should take your readings at the same time every day. The AHA has different categories for blood pressure to help you know what your numbers mean (see Table 1).

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Keep a log of your readings and take it to every doctor visit. This allows your doctor to keep track of your blood pressure and change your treatment plan if needed. Use the log on the next page (Table 2) and make copies as necessary.

Table 1. Blood pressure categories from the American Heart Association

Category	Systolic ¹ (mm Hg)		Diastolic ² (mm Hg)
Normal	<120	and	<80
Prehypertension	120–139	or	80–89
High			
Stage 1	140–159	or	90–99
Stage 2	≥160	or	≥100

¹ Systolic pressure is represented by the top number in your blood pressure reading. This number is the higher of the two numbers and measures pressure in your arteries when your heart beats, or during the contraction of the heart muscle (AHA, 2012c).

² Diastolic pressure is represented by the bottom number in your blood pressure reading. This number is the lower of the two numbers and measures the pressure in your arteries between heartbeats, or when the heart muscle is at rest and the heart is refilling with blood (AHA, 2012c).

American Heart Association. (2012b). *How to monitor and record your blood pressure*. Retrieved from http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@hcm/documents/downloadable/ucm_445846.pdf

American Heart Association. (2012c). *Understanding blood pressure readings*. Retrieved from http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/GettheFacts-AboutHighBloodPressure/Understanding-Blood-Pressure-Readings_UCM_301764_Article.jsp#.WNFWxalpAdU



Figure 2. Your doctor will check your blood pressure at every visit and review your blood pressure log.

Credits: Monkey Business

References

American Heart Association. (2012a). *Choosing a home blood pressure monitor*. Retrieved from http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/KnowYourNumbers/Monitoring-Your-Blood-Pressure-at-Home_UCM_301874_Article.jsp#.WNFTJ6IpAdU

