

# How to Monitor Your Blood Pressure

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For most people with high blood pressure, **home monitoring** is an important part of the treatment plan. Here's how it can help:

- It helps your healthcare providers — and you — see how well lifestyle changes or medications are controlling your blood pressure. This can help fine-tune your treatment plan.
- It helps doctors evaluate whether you might have “white-coat” hypertension, which means your blood pressure tends to be high only at the doctor’s office.
- It helps keep you focused on staying healthy — and motivates you to continue taking care of yourself.

## How often to monitor

How often you measure and record your blood pressure is up to you and your doctor. When you're first diagnosed with high blood pressure, or after changes to your medications, you may be asked to take your blood pressure daily — maybe even twice a day (morning and evening). Once your blood pressure becomes more stable, you can monitor less frequently.

## How to choose a monitor

There are many types of blood pressure monitors on the market. You can purchase them in a drugstore, supermarket pharmacy, or other large store. Here are some tips for choosing a blood pressure monitor:

- **If possible, choose a monitor that inflates automatically.** A good automatic arm monitor costs about \$50 to \$100. If you have a monitor with a “squeeze ball,” have someone else squeeze the ball to inflate the cuff.



- **Choose a monitor that also shows your heart rate.** Some blood pressure medications affect your heart rate (heartbeats per minute), so your doctor may ask you to keep track of it. A normal heart rate is 60 to 100.
- **Choose a monitor with a cuff that wraps around the upper arm.** Avoid wrist cuffs. Arm monitors are more accurate.
- **Be sure the arm cuff is the right size for your arm.** Most cuffs fit upper arms that are 9 to 13 inches around. If your upper arm is more than 13 inches, buy a monitor with a large cuff. You may have to pay extra or order the large cuff separately, but it's worth it. Using the right size cuff will help ensure a correct measurement.

## How to monitor accurately

It's vital that blood pressure measurement is accurate. You don't want your blood pressure treatment to be based on incorrect measurements.

Here are some tips to ensure you get the most accurate readings possible:

- **Compare your blood pressure machine to the one used in your healthcare provider's office.** Have your healthcare provider check your monitor about every six months. If you drop the monitor, or readings change abruptly, have it checked right away.
- **Make sure the blood pressure cuff is the correct size for your arm,** and that it's positioned correctly with no wrinkles in the cuff. Remove clothing that interferes with cuff placement. Also avoid tight or restrictive clothing (like rolling up a sleeve to expose the arm).
- **Don't take your blood pressure within a half hour of eating** a heavy meal, drinking caffeine or alcohol, exercising, or using tobacco products. These things can temporarily raise your blood pressure. A full bladder can also raise your blood pressure, so use the restroom first.
- **Rest both feet flat on the floor with your back supported.** Rest your arm at heart level on a table or the arm of a chair, using a small pillow if needed.
- **Sit quietly for 5 minutes or more before taking your blood pressure.** Avoid talking or other distractions. Take 2 or 3 readings at least 2 minutes apart, and record all the results.

- **Record the time you take your blood pressure.** Your blood pressure can go up or down based on the time of day or what you're doing. Recording the time you take your blood pressure will help you and your blood pressure team see a pattern.
- **Record which arm the reading is from.** Most patients should measure BP in the non-dominant arm. (That is, if you're right handed, measure on your left arm.) However, because blood pressure in one arm can be different from the other arm, your doctor may recommend you check both arms at first. If there is a consistent difference, tell your doctor and then regularly measure in the arm with the higher reading.  
  
If you have a fistula in your arm (for dialysis), or if you've had a stroke or a radical mastectomy on one side, take your BP on the other arm — unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

### Ask your healthcare providers for a copy of the *BP Tracker*

This pocket-sized tracker provides an easy way to keep track of your blood pressure readings and show them to your doctor.

