

# Measuring your blood pressure at home

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## What is blood pressure?

Your heart is a muscle that pumps blood to your body's organs and tissues. Blood is pumped out of the left side of your heart into the arteries, the blood vessels that carry the blood's oxygen and nutrients to your body. As the blood pumps out of the heart and into the arteries, it pushes against the artery walls. Blood pressure is the measurement of the pressure of the blood in the artery.

Your blood pressure will go up and down throughout the day. It depends on the time of day, the amount of fluid in your body, the medicines in your system and what you are doing when your blood pressure is being measured.

High blood pressure (hypertension) is a condition where your blood pressure is consistently higher than normal. Hypertension can cause damage to your blood vessels, heart, brain and other important organs.

It is important to talk to your doctor about how to manage high blood pressure.

## Advantages of measuring your blood pressure at home

Blood pressure varies from moment to moment. It is affected by things such as your body position, breathing, emotions, exercise and sleep. Your blood pressure is usually lowest when you are sleeping. It rises when you are excited, stressed or exercising. Temporary rises are natural and your blood pressure returns to normal when you rest. These constant changes can make it difficult to get a true picture of your blood pressure.

Measuring your blood pressure at home is a good way to understand how your blood pressure changes during the day, from one day to the next and in response to lifestyle changes and medical treatment. Your general practitioner (GP) may recommend that you take regular blood pressure measurements at home and take your records with you on your next GP visit. Your GP may use your home measurements to make treatment decisions. If you need to take your blood pressure at home, your GP will tell you what you need to do.

Your GP is unlikely to change your treatment based on a single blood pressure reading. If you have consistently high blood pressure readings, it is important for your GP to review your treatment.

## Tips for buying a blood pressure monitor

The Heart Foundation does not endorse or recommend a particular blood pressure monitor. You can find a list of validated devices on the British Hypertension Society website, <http://www.bhsoc.org/bp-monitors/bp-monitors/>.

Here are some helpful tips to help you when buying a blood pressure monitor.

- Buy through your local pharmacy, chemist, a reputable online shop or a medical equipment supplier.
- Choose a brand name that is familiar to you or your GP.
- Remember that many devices have not been formally tested for accuracy, so use them as a guide only.
- Make sure that the cuff fits your arm within the accepted range on the device's cuff.
- Note that finger and wrist blood pressure measuring devices are not recommended.
- Consider the type of monitor you want, aneroid or electronic.
  - Aneroid devices:
    - are very accurate, but need to be calibrated every 6–12 months
    - are inexpensive compared to electronic devices
    - are easy to maintain and repair
    - usually require more training to use properly
    - can be difficult to use if you have hearing difficulties, poor eye sight or difficulty turning the valve slowly enough to deflate the cuff.
  - Electronic devices:
    - vary widely in reliability and cost (usually more expensive)
    - require regular maintenance to ensure there are no leaks in rubber tubing
    - are easier to use.

## How to get accurate blood pressure readings

Your blood pressure reading is usually shown as two numbers written one over the other. The top number is your systolic reading, which is the measurement of the pressure in the arteries when your heart muscle contracts and pumps blood. The bottom number is the diastolic reading, which is the measurement of the pressure in the arteries when your heart muscle relaxes and refills with blood.

You can use these tips to help you get an accurate blood pressure reading.

- Develop a good technique.
  - Ask a trained health professional (GP, nurse, technician) to teach you how to use your device.
  - Get a trained health professional to watch your technique and give you tips.
  - Make sure the machine has instructions you can understand.
  - Ask a trained health professional to check your technique twice a year so you don't develop bad habits (e.g. poor cuff placement).
- Be relaxed and comfortable.
  - Avoid drinking tea or coffee, or smoking 30 minutes before measuring your blood pressure.
  - Choose a comfortable place without distractions like loud music or the television.
  - Wait at least 5 minutes after you are comfortable before taking the reading.
  - Sit with your feet flat on the floor, legs uncrossed, upper arm bare and with your back and arm supported.
- Record your blood pressure at least twice each time; take the readings 1 minute apart.
- Wait at least 2 minutes after standing to record your blood pressure if your GP asked for standing blood pressure readings.
- Measure your blood pressure under the same conditions, around the same time of the day and in the same way, as much as possible.
- Don't take your blood pressure when you are uncomfortable, stressed or in pain.
- Write down your blood pressure measurement each time (don't rely on your memory), and record comments about any stressful events or symptoms that may be relevant (refer below).
- Take your recorded readings to your next GP visit.

## How often should I measure my blood pressure?

Your GP or health professional can advise you how often you should measure your blood pressure. It will depend on your condition and treatment and what your GP thinks is most important for you, i.e. first thing in the morning, standing or after medication.

Once your GP is happy with your blood pressure levels, you should take regular readings about 2–3 times a week. This will help you keep up your skills and make sure you can take accurate readings.

The table below includes an example of the information your GP needs to assess your condition.

Date	Time	Position	Blood pressure reading	Comments
08/08/16	7 am	Lying	140/85	Just woke up
	12.30 pm	Sitting	160/75	Had the grandchildren over
	2 pm	Sitting	145/60	Resting, taken medication

**For heart health information, please contact us**  
**1300 36 27 87**  
**heartfoundation.org.au**



If you need an interpreter, call TIS National on 131 450.

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INF-041-C.v2