

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 (hypertension)? In either case, it is recommended that you 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 and, if so, whether your treatment plan is working. Read on to learn how to monitor your blood pressure at home.

How to Check

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends using an approved automatic, cuff-style, upper-arm (bicep) monitor to check your blood pressure. Follow these AHA guidelines to ensure an accurate reading (AHA, 2016):

1. Make sure the cuff fits.
2. Do not smoke, drink caffeinated beverages, or exercise within 30 minutes of measuring blood pressure.
3. Be still.
4. Sit with your back straight and supported.
5. Place your feet flat on the floor.



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6. Support your arm on a flat surface such as a table with your upper arm at heart level.
7. Wrap the cuff around your upper arm and check that the bottom of the cuff is placed where your arm bends.
8. Take two or three readings one minute apart and record all results.
9. 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. This variation is why you should take your readings at the same time every day. The AHA has different categories for blood pressure to help you find out what your numbers mean (see Table 1).

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 last page (Table 2) and make copies as necessary.



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Table 1. Blood pressure categories from the American Heart Association.

Category	Systolic¹ (mm Hg)		Diastolic² (mm Hg)
Normal	<120	and	<80
Elevated	120–129	and	<80
High Blood Pressure			
Stage 1	130–139	or	80–89
Stage 2	≥140	or	≥90

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, 2017).

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, 2017).

Source: Whelton et al. (2017)

