

BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORING AT HOME

A/P Goh Lee Gan

HOW DOES MEASURING MY BLOOD PRESSURE AT HOME AND KEEPING A RECORD OF IT BENEFIT ME?

Measuring your blood pressure at home and keeping a record of the measurements will show you and your doctor how much your blood pressure changes during the day. Your doctor can use the measurements to see how well your medicine is working to control your high blood pressure.

WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED TO MEASURE MY BLOOD PRESSURE?

To measure your blood pressure at home, you can use either an aneroid monitor or a digital monitor. The aneroid monitor has a dial gauge that is read by looking at a pointer. The cuff is inflated by hand, by squeezing a rubber bulb. Digital monitors have either manual or automatic cuffs. The blood pressure reading flashes on a small screen. Choose the type of monitor that best suits your needs.

WHAT ARE THE FEATURES TO LOOK FOR IN A BLOOD PRESSURE MONITOR?

- κ The right cuff size is very important. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to tell you the cuff size you need, based on the size of your arm. Blood pressure readings will be wrong if your cuff is the wrong size.
- κ The numbers on the monitor must be easy for you to read.
- κ If you are using a stethoscope, you must be able to hear heart sounds through it.
- κ Cost may be an important factor. Since home blood pressure units vary in price, you may have to shop around. The most expensive units might not be the best or the most accurate.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY MONITORING DEVICE IS ACCURATE OR IF I AM USING IT CORRECTLY?

Once you buy your monitor, take it to your doctor's office to check it for accuracy. You should have your monitor checked once a year. Proper care and storage are also necessary. Make sure the tubing is not twisted when the monitor is stored and keep it away from heat. Periodically check the tubing for cracks and leaks.

Ask your doctor or nurse to teach you how to use your blood pressure monitor correctly. Proper use of it will help you and your doctor achieve good results in controlling your blood pressure.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO BEFORE I MEASURE MY BLOOD PRESSURE?

1. Rest for 3 to 5 minutes before measuring your blood pressure. Do not talk.
2. Sit in a comfortable position, with your legs and ankles uncrossed and your back supported.
3. Place your arm, raised to the level of your heart, on a table or a desk and sit still.
4. Wrap the correctly sized cuff smoothly and snugly around the upper part of your bare arm. The cuff should fit snugly, but there should be enough room for you to slip one fingertip under the cuff.
5. Be certain that the bottom edge of the cuff is 1 inch above the crease of your elbow.

HOW DO I USE AN ANEROID MONITOR?

1. Put the stethoscope earpieces into your ears, with the earpieces facing forward.
2. Place the stethoscope disk on the inner side of the crease of your elbow.
3. Rapidly inflate the cuff by squeezing the rubber bulb to 30 to 40 points higher than your last systolic reading. Inflate the cuff rapidly, not just a little at a time. Inflating the cuff too slowly will cause a false reading.
4. Slightly loosen the valve and slowly let some air out of the cuff. Deflate the cuff by 2 to 3 millimetres per second. If you loosen the valve too much, you will not be able to determine your blood pressure.
5. As you let the air out of the cuff, you will begin to hear your heartbeat. Listen carefully for the first sound. Check the blood pressure reading by looking at the pointer on the dial. This number will be your systolic pressure.
6. Continue to deflate the cuff. Listen to your heartbeat. You will hear your heartbeat stop at some point. Check the reading on the dial. This number is your diastolic pressure.
7. Write down your blood pressure, putting the systolic pressure before the diastolic pressure (for example, 120/80).
8. If you want to repeat the measurement, wait 2 to 3 minutes before re-inflating the cuff.

HOW DO I USE A DIGITAL MONITOR?

1. Put the cuff around the arm. Turn on the power, and start the machine.
2. The cuff will inflate by itself with a push of a button on the automatic models. On the semi-automatic models, the cuff is inflated by squeezing the rubber bulb. After the cuff is inflated, the automatic mechanism will slowly reduce the cuff pressure.
3. Look at the display window to see your blood pressure reading. The machine will show your systolic and diastolic blood pressures on the screen. Write down your blood pressure, putting the systolic pressure before the diastolic pressure.
4. Press the exhaust button to release all of the air from the cuff.
5. If you want to repeat the measurement, wait 2 to 3 minutes before re-inflating the cuff.

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American College of Family Physicians. Blood Pressure Monitoring At Home, 2001.