

Health Tips

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with

Dr. D


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Health Tip: Home Blood Pressure Monitoring

Blood pressure monitoring does not always have to be performed in the doctor's office. Highly accurate and relatively inexpensive blood pressure monitors are available for home use. With a little training and knowledge these devices can provide important information to help manage a condition that typically has few associated symptoms.



Who should consider home blood pressure monitoring:

In known hypertensives, one of the primary reasons for monitoring blood pressure at home is to assure treatment effectiveness. In fact, studies have demonstrated that taking one's own blood pressure will result in better control. There are others who would benefit also. If the blood pressure is considered to be "borderline", additional readings at home will help determine if and when treatment may be necessary. In those with "white coat" hypertension (high readings in

the doctor's office due to anxiety), the use of a home monitor will allow readings to be taken at a less anxiety-provoking location. For those with the opposite problem, suspected hypertension but normal blood pressure readings in the doctor's office, home monitoring will help uncover the truth.

What is the best type of home blood pressure monitor? Make sure that the monitor that you purchase has received approval by one of the following organizations---the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation, the British Hypertension Society, or the International Protocol for the Validation of Automated BP Measuring Devices. The American Heart Association recommends an automatic cuff-style, upper arm monitor. A newer type of home monitor measures the blood pressure at the wrist, but these are considered to be less accurate. Whichever monitor you choose, it is highly important to have the readings validated by comparing its results with those of a mercury aneroid blood pressure monitor at the doctor's office. Without doing this, you cannot be sure that the readings that you are getting at home are comparable to those in the doctor's office. Once a year, home blood pressure monitors should be rechecked with the doctor's to assure accuracy.

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Two issues affecting free blood pressure monitors may lead to inaccurate readings. The first relates to the size of the cuff that is placed around the arm when taking the measurement. Ideally, the inflatable portion of the cuff should cover 80% of the upper arm. If the cuff is too large or too small, inaccuracies can result. The second has to do with maintenance of the measuring device. Blood pressure monitors, and particularly those in a public locations, need to undergo periodic calibration (checking or adjusting by comparison with a standard) to assure the

accuracy of the instrument. Readings taken with inappropriate or poorly maintained equipment can lead to a false sense of security if the readings are erroneously low or to unnecessary concern if the readings are falsely elevated.

How to take your blood pressure at home: For the most accurate readings, follow these guidelines provided by the American Heart Association:

- Make sure the cuff fits: measure around your upper arm and choose a monitor that comes with the correct size cuff.
- Don't smoke, drink caffeinated beverages or exercise within the 30 minutes before measuring your BP.
- Sit with your back straight and supported (on a dining chair, for example, rather than a sofa). Your feet should be flat on the floor; don't cross your legs. Your arm should be supported on a flat surface (such as a table) with the upper arm at heart level. Make sure the middle of the cuff is placed directly over your brachial artery - check your monitor's instructions for an illustration or have your healthcare provider show you how.
- Each time you measure, take two or three readings, one minute apart, and record all the results.
- It's important to take the readings at the same time each day, such as morning and evening, or as your healthcare professional recommends.

Surveillance for suspected hypertension, assuring the effectiveness of "lifestyle" measures for elevated blood pressure, as well as monitoring the effectiveness of medication treatment are all facilitated by writing down and bringing your home blood pressure readings to your doctor. This simple measure can not only improve blood pressure control and prevent hypertensive complications, but can also reduce the number of necessary doctor's visits and associated expense.

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