



Blood Pressure Monitoring at Home

– Frequently Asked Questions

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

1. What kind of blood pressure monitor should I buy?

If you are buying a home blood pressure monitor, choose one that measures your blood pressure at your upper arm, not your wrist or finger. This will provide you with more accurate readings. Ensure also, that the cuff is the right size for your arm. When wrapped around your upper arm, there should be just enough space to slide two fingertips underneath. Most home blood pressure monitors will come with a medium-sized cuff, but if your upper arm is particularly larger or smaller than average, you may need to buy a different sized cuff separately.

For a list of validated blood pressure monitors you can visit the following website (<https://bihsoc.org/bp-monitors/for-home-use/>)

Your blood pressure monitor will need to be regularly serviced and calibrated to make sure you are still getting accurate readings. Generally, at least once every two years, you will need to send it back to the manufacturer, who will probably charge a fee for this. If this option is too complicated or expensive it may be easier and cheaper to buy a new monitor.

If you have any queries or concerns about your blood pressure monitor, speak to a health professional.



2. How do I carry out a blood pressure check?

Before your test:

- Always use the same arm. If possible, use the arm that your doctor or nurse uses when they measure your blood pressure or when you first use your machine, measure your blood pressure in both arms and use the arm which gives slightly higher readings. If there is consistently a difference of more than 10 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) for either your top number (systolic pressure) or bottom number (diastolic) between your two arms, we would recommend you see a health professional.
- Ensure you sit upright with your back supported.
- Ensure you have your 2 feet firmly planted on the floor and that you do not cross your legs.
- Bare skin is ideal but if clothes are thin for example a shirt it can be taken over this.
- Relax - It is also important to ensure that you are at rest, so allow yourself to sit for 5 to 10 minutes to relax. You can also do some deep breathing during this time - visit www.nichs.org.uk/copewithstress for videos on breathing exercises to help with this.
- For an accurate reading you must also have adhered to the following, 30minutes in advance of a blood pressure check:
 - No eating or drinking, including alcohol
 - No exercising
 - No smoking
 - No bathing

To begin your blood pressure check:

- Place the cuff on the upper arm with the plastic tubing facing down towards the hand. The cuff should be about 2cm above your elbow to make sure it can detect the artery in your arm, just under the skin.
- Rest your arm on a solid surface such as a table so it is at the same level as your heart, with the palm of your hand resting up.
- It is important that you sit still and do not talk during the test as this can affect the accuracy of the result.

During the test:

- When you are ready press the start button on the blood pressure monitor.
- The cuff is pumped up to restrict the blood flow in your arm – this squeezing may feel a bit uncomfortable, but it will only last a few seconds.
- The pressure in the cuff is then slowly released and during this time the monitor uses sensors to detect vibrations in your arteries.
- The pressure in the cuff is recorded at 2 points as the blood flow starts to return to your arm – these measurements are used to give your blood pressure reading.

After the test:

- Once the monitor has fully released the pressure and provided a result on the monitor, remove the cuff from your arm.
- Take two or three readings, each about one to two minutes apart. If your first reading is much higher than the next, ignore it and take an extra reading. Once you have two to three readings, you can work out the average.
- Keep a record of your measurements and write them down exactly as they appear on screen.

3. How often should I get my blood pressure checked?

If you have been asked by a health professional to monitor your blood pressure over a period of a week to assess whether your blood pressure is remaining at a high blood pressure threshold, you should check your blood pressure both morning and night. Record each of the readings and remember to do 3 readings each time if your blood pressure is reading over 140/90mmHg. Take the average of these readings.

Once your blood pressure is controlled, check with your health professional i.e. your GP, how often you should monitor your blood pressure at home.

It is recommended to still get a blood pressure check with a health professional every 5 years if you are over the age of 40, or every year if you are on blood pressure medication.



5. What is blood pressure and what do the numbers mean?

Blood pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury or mmHg. When your blood pressure appears on the screen you will see a top number and a bottom number.

- **Systolic pressure is the top number. This is the pressure when your heart pumps blood through the arteries and around your body.**
- **Diastolic pressure is the bottom number. This is the pressure when your heart is resting in between beats.**

For example, if your blood pressure is “140 over 90” or 140/90mmHg, it means you have a systolic pressure of 140mmHg and a diastolic pressure of 90mmHg.

As a general guide:

Ideal blood pressure is considered to be between 90/60mmHg and 120/80mmHg.

High blood pressure is considered to be 140/90mmHg or higher.

Low blood pressure is considered to be 90/60mmHg or lower.

- If your average reading is consistently over 140/90mmHg you should get it checked with a health professional, either with the pharmacist, your GP or at a health check and Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke.

6. What can I do to help lower my blood pressure or maintain a healthy blood pressure?

In addition to taking your medication if required, you can also make changes to your lifestyle to help reduce your blood pressure or maintain it at a healthy level:

- **Losing weight**



- **Reducing your salt intake**



- **Limiting the amount of alcohol you drink**



- **Taking regular exercise and being more active**



- **Increasing the amount of fruit and vegetables you eat**



7. Useful tips to remember


- Don't check your blood pressure too often as some people find that they become worried or stressed about small changes in their readings. Small changes are normal throughout the day. Stress can also raise your blood pressure in the short term, making your reading higher than it should be.
- Try to take your blood pressure at the same time each reading.
- Don't stop taking your medications if your blood pressure falls. Always speak to your doctor before stopping your medications, even if your blood pressure has fallen to a healthy level according to your home monitor.
- Speak to a health professional if you are worried or have any concerns about your readings or home monitoring. If you think you may be having a stroke or heart attack call 999 immediately.

If you have any queries about measuring your blood pressure at home, please speak to a health professional at your local pharmacist, GP surgery or at Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke.

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