

Blood pressure is the force on the walls of the blood vessels as blood circulates throughout the body. Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers: for example, 110/70. The top number, or systolic pressure, is the larger of the two numbers and measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats. The bottom number, or diastolic pressure, is the smaller of the two numbers and measures the pressure in the arteries as the heart relaxes in between beats.

Many things affect blood pressure. Taking accurate measurements at different times during the day gives your physician a clearer picture of your blood pressure. The American Heart Association recommends an automatic, cuff-style, bicep (upper arm) monitor. This can be purchased at most pharmacies, online and at many stores. Always discuss with your primary care physician which device they recommend, and the blood pressure range they recommend.

Why monitoring blood pressure is important

- High blood pressure can damage the body even when people don't have any symptoms. Some effects may include:
 - Damage to the arteries which can lead to heart disease, heart attack or stroke
 - Kidney disease
 - Dementia
 - Decrease or increase in delivery of blood to the brain
- Low blood pressure occurs when not enough blood reaches all parts of the body resulting in cells not receiving enough oxygen and nutrients. Some effects of low blood pressure may include:
 - Dizziness; especially when standing
 - Fainting
 - Dehydration
 - Heart attack
 - Very rapid heartbeat (tachycardia)
 - Very slow heartbeat (bradycardia)
 - Abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmia)
- Having a brain injury makes the brain more sensitive to additional injury.

What can you do?

- There are controllable risk factors that if managed can decrease the long-term effects of abnormal blood pressure. Some of the major controllable risk factors include:
 - Smoking
 - Cholesterol
 - Diabetes
 - Diet that is high in caffeine, salt, sugar and/or fat
 - Lack of exercise
 - Pain management
 - Obesity



Tips to measure your own blood pressure

- Measure blood pressure at the same time each morning and each evening.
- Place arm on the table or support arm. Do not let it hang down below heart.
- Place blood pressure cuff snugly (not tight) to the upper arm. If this is not an option, you can also use the lower arm, thigh, or calf (see pictures below). If the person cannot be seated, it is OK to take the blood pressure while lying down. Just remember the arm should be supported at the level of the heart.
- Do not take blood pressure in a paralyzed limb.
- It is IMPORTANT that the cuff is properly sized. Too large of a cuff will give you an incorrect “low” reading and too small of a cuff will give you an incorrect “higher” reading.
- Relax for a minute or two then take the measurement; this can be repeated after 2 minutes.
- Record the blood pressure results in a log or journal. (Also available on myshepherdconnection.org)
- Please consult with your healthcare provider for specific recommendations of automatic blood pressure monitors. (Always follow the manufacturers guidelines of the device you are using.)

Cuff Placement

Placement of cuff on upper arm (preferred):



Placement of cuff on forearm:



Placement of cuff on upper thigh:



Placement of cuff on lower leg/calf:



When to call the doctor

If you experience dizziness or lightheadedness, there could be an underlying cause and you should always notify your healthcare provider. If your blood pressure remains higher than what your healthcare provider recommends, notify him/her, and follow any instructions they may have given you and be sure to keep your follow-up visit.

For more information, please visit *American Heart Association. What is High Blood Pressure?*

<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/the-facts-about-high-blood-pressure/what-is-high-blood-pressure>

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