

TAKING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

A GUIDE FOR SELF-MONITORING

HHG9
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If you are on a program for control of high blood pressure, it is probably a good idea to learn how to take your own blood pressure. Blood pressure kits can be purchased at your local surgical supply store. The electronic digital type is easiest to use but you could also learn to use the standard blood pressure cuff with separate stethoscope. To get the most accurate results, make sure your equipment is in good working order. Have it checked periodically against the more accurate mercury-type blood pressure apparatus at your local hospital or doctor's office. You can take your blood pressure at any time of the day but don't take a reading just after smoking a cigarette or drinking a beverage with caffeine or if you have a full bladder. Take your blood pressure when you are relaxed and sitting up for at least 5 minutes. Start by taking the blood pressure in both arms. It is common for blood pressure readings to differ by as much as 10 points. If the readings stay consistently similar, your doctor may suggest you use the arm with the higher reading. Ask your doctor what range your blood pressure should be and what to do should your blood pressure become too high or too low. Here are other guidelines:

- 1 Sit at a table with your arm comfortably extended. When using a digital machine, note the product instruction sheet for the best placement of your arm to increase the accuracy of the reading.
- 2 Place the cuff onto a bare upper arm. The cuff should fit snugly. It should wrap easily around the upper arm with some overlap. The edge of the cuff should be about one inch above the bend of the arm with the middle of the bladder (the rubber insert) over the brachial artery (locate the brachial artery by gently depressing your index and middle finger over the area and feeling for a pulse). Special cuffs are designed for those with a large upper arm. An improper reading will result if using a regular cuff on an obese person's arm.
- 3 Inflate the cuff to 180 or as directed on the instructions. The numbers on the digital scale will read on a screen when inflation and deflation have been completed. This is the number you record. Write down the date, time and blood pressure reading with the higher number on the top and the lower number on the bottom. *See sample Record below.*



Date	BP	Comments
10/02/2001	160/88	Started on BP medication
10/09/2001	140/77	Watching my salt more closely

- 4 If using a standard stethoscope, you may need someone to help you. Place the ear pieces in your ears and the diaphragm over the middle bend of the arm where you felt the brachial artery pulse – just below the edge of the cuff.

Squeeze the bulb to inflate the cuff quickly to 180 (or to 20 points above the last reading), then slowly and carefully open the valve (located on the side of the bulb), to release the air.



Stethoscope

Listen Carefully. Note the number reading when you first heard sound and the number reading when you last heard sound. Record these two numbers as noted above (*refer to sample*).

Note: The higher number is the Systolic pressure and is the pressure exerted on artery walls when the heart is in the contracting phase. The lower number is the Diastolic pressure and is the pressure exerted on artery walls when the heart is in the resting phase. Blood pressure is considered normal if the systolic is less than 135 and the diastolic is less than 85. When the bottom number goes above 85 and stays there, you are considered to have high blood pressure. For more information on high blood pressure go to www.nhlbi.nih.gov

HEALTHY HEARTS PROGRAM

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