

Taking Your Blood Pressure at Home

What is blood pressure and why is it important?

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard the blood pushes against the walls of your arteries as it moves through your body. This force makes blood flow possible, delivering nutrients and oxygen to organs and tissues throughout the body. ^{1,2}



Your blood pressure reading is based on two numbers: ³

- 1. Systolic blood pressure (first or top number):** tells how much pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls when the heart beats
- 2. Diastolic blood pressure (second or bottom number):** tells how much pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls when the heart is resting between beats

Blood pressure control is particularly important for patients with kidney disease. When blood pressure is not well controlled, it can cause serious health issues including reducing your kidney function over time.

Why do I need to monitor my blood pressure at home?

Taking your blood pressure regularly at home is more accurate than having it taken at a doctor's office or clinic. Some people experience high blood pressure when seeing a health care provider ("white coat effect"). Routine home monitoring is a better way to follow your blood pressure than just checking it at the doctor's office every now and then.

Home blood pressure monitoring helps:

- Identify changes in your blood pressure over time. If you see changes, contact your kidney care team to see if changes in your treatment plan are needed (rather than waiting for your next appointment).
- Track your blood pressure response to changes in your treatment plan, such as physical activity, diet and medication changes.

Purchasing a blood pressure device

(refer to <https://hypertension.ca/bpdevices>)

1. Devices can be purchased from most pharmacies and stores that sell health care equipment and on-line. A device does not have to be expensive to be good.
2. Choose a device that says “Recommended by Hypertension Canada” on the box or in the material supplied with the device. Both the gold and silver logos are accepted as accurate. If purchasing on-line, check that the brand/model is listed on the Hypertension Canada website.
3. Choose a device that measures blood pressure in your upper arm. Wrist, forearm or finger monitors are less reliable.^{3,4}
4. It is important that the cuff fit properly. Before buying a device, ask your kidney care team about what size cuff to buy.
5. If you have special needs (e.g., poor vision, difficulty using your hands, irregular heart rhythm) or need financial assistance, discuss options with your kidney care team. Some extended health plans may cover all or a portion of the cost. Contact your insurance provider before buying. Otherwise, keep your receipt as you may be eligible for a credit on your income tax.
6. It is ok to share a blood pressure machine with other members of your household. If the cuff size is the same, you may also share the cuff but it needs to be cleaned with a disinfectant wipe between uses. Each person using the machine needs to track their own blood pressure readings.



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Checking your blood pressure monitor



It is important to have your device checked to make sure it is measuring your blood pressure accurately. Take it to your doctor's office, kidney care clinic or community pharmacy.

The doctor, nurse or pharmacist will compare the measurement taken on your device with the measurement taken on the device in the office/clinic/pharmacy. Readings don't have to match exactly. Your health care provider will tell you if it is working properly.

Take your device to be checked:

- Before you use it the first time; and
- At least once per year (more if the manufacturer recommends); and
- If it gets dropped or damaged

Taking your blood pressure and heart rate

Your kidney care team will suggest how often and the best time(s) to take your blood pressure and heart rate. You may be asked to take them more often for a short period or at specific times (e.g., when you first start measuring your blood pressure at home, before each clinic visit, after changes in your treatment).

When planning to take your blood pressure and heart rate:

- Wait at least 1 hour after drinking coffee or smoking and at least 30 minutes after exercise (these can raise your blood pressure and heart rate). Ask your kidney care team if there is a specific time you should take your blood pressure and heart rate.
- Rest quietly for 5 minutes before starting. Some people like to do relaxation exercises beforehand.
- If you take blood pressure medications, ask your kidney care team about the best time to take your blood pressure.

When taking your blood pressure: ⁵

1. Find a comfortable, distraction-free place.
2. Sit with your feet flat on the floor and back supported. Put your bare arm on an arm rest or table at heart level. If you are asked to check a standing blood pressure the team will describe how.
3. Place the cuff on the arm you use the least (non-dominant arm) unless your team tells you otherwise (e.g., use the arm without the vascular access if you have a vascular access in place, or use the right arm if you are a child). Place the cuff on bare skin, not over clothing. Use the same arm each time.
4. Squeeze the air out of the cuff and wrap it around your bare arm. Make sure the cuff is aligned properly. Most cuffs will have an indicator for this.
5. Take 2 blood pressure readings, one minute apart.
6. Useful videos on using your home blood pressure monitor:
 - www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tGyRJxbYpQ (4.5 min)
 - <https://hypertension.ca/hypertension-and-you/about-hypertension/what-is-high-blood-pressure> (Hypertension Canada, 10 min)

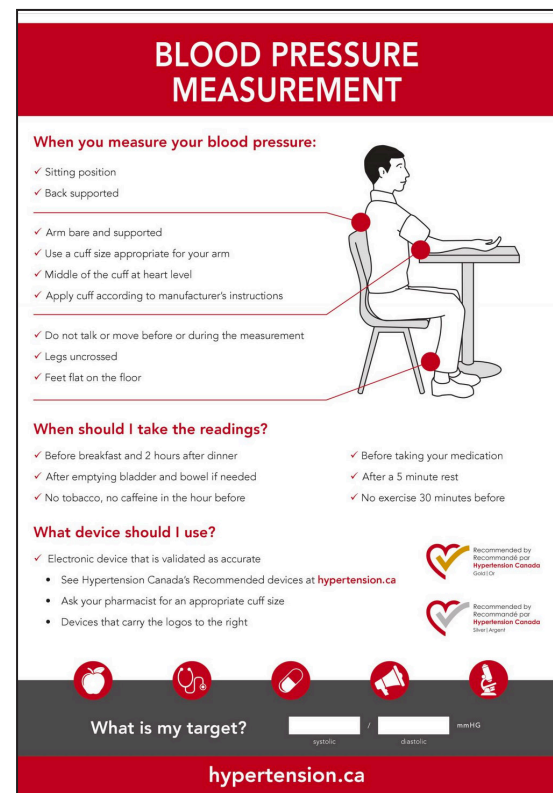


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[Hypertension.ca](https://hypertension.ca)

Record your blood pressure and heart rate:

- Write your blood pressure and heart rate in your calendar or on a blood pressure log. See sample blood pressure log at https://hypertension.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HTC_HomeBPLog_ENG_PREVIEW.pdf (Hypertension Canada website)
- Record how you are feeling at the time your blood pressure and heart rate was taken, especially if you are feeling different from your normal. Also, if you are on blood pressure medication(s), record when you took the medication.
- Discuss the best way to share your blood pressure and heart rate measurements with your kidney care team

What do I do if my blood pressure is out of range (low or high)?

Different people have different blood pressure targets depending on their health conditions and other factors. Your exact target should be discussed with your kidney care team. This target may change over time. If you are recovering from a serious illness or hospitalization, ask your care team to review your target.



When to contact your kidney care team or primary care provider:

If your blood pressure is less than 10 mm Hg above or below target (top or bottom number) over several readings and days, bring this up at your next appointment with your kidney care team or primary care provider.

If your blood pressure is more than 10 mm Hg above or below target (top or bottom number) over several readings and days, contact your kidney care team or primary care provider. Do not wait for your next appointment.

Contact: _____



When to seek medical assistance immediately:

If your blood pressure is high or low (as above) AND you are experiencing chest pain, shortness of breath, back pain, numbness/weakness, light headedness/dizziness, change in vision or difficulty speaking

OR

If your blood pressure is more than 180/110 (top or bottom number) even if you are not experiencing symptoms.



Blood pressure target:

My blood pressure target is:

Date:

- If you get an unusually high or low reading, wait 5 minutes and test again.

What else do I need to think about?

1. **Take all medications as prescribed, even when your blood pressure is within your target range. Don't change your medications (including over-the-counter medications or supplements) without talking to your kidney care team.**
2. A healthy diet is key to maintaining healthy blood pressure. Talk to your kidney care team before making major changes to your diet.
3. Home blood pressure monitoring is important but it is NOT a substitute for clinic visits.
4. Blood pressure changes naturally many times a day. If it fluctuates a lot, your health care provider may suggest other methods to measure your blood pressure.
5. If you have a bad flu or other illness which causes you to vomit or have diarrhea AND you cannot eat or drink normally, you may become dehydrated (dry). Dehydration can affect your kidney function and blood pressure. Know which medications you should temporarily stop taking if this happens. Visit: [BCRenal.ca](#) ► [Health Info](#) ► [Managing My Care](#) ► [Medication](#) ► [What to do if you are sick](#)

References

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