

# MEASURING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE AT HOME



**Blood Pressure UK**

Helping you to lower your  
blood pressure

# About this booklet

This is one of a series of booklets produced by Blood Pressure UK, to help people with high blood pressure take practical steps to manage their condition. The booklets in the series are:

- 1 Introducing high blood pressure**
- 2 Healthy eating and blood pressure**
- 3 Healthy lifestyle and blood pressure**
- 4 Getting the most from blood pressure medicines**
- 5 Measuring your blood pressure at home**

Blood Pressure UK is a registered charity and we rely on donations to help us carry out our work. We would be grateful for any donation that you can make towards the cost of producing this booklet. Contact us by telephone **(020) 7882 6255** or visit our website: **[www.bloodpressureuk.org](http://www.bloodpressureuk.org)**

High blood pressure is the **biggest** known cause of disability and premature death in the UK through stroke, heart attack and heart disease. **One in three adults** in the UK **has high blood pressure** and every day 350 people have a preventable stroke or heart attack caused by the condition.

# Why measure blood pressure at home?

Your doctor or nurse will want to measure your blood pressure regularly. This is to make sure that medicines or lifestyle changes are helping to bring your blood pressure down.

However, you may also want to measure your blood pressure yourself at home. Home monitoring doesn't have to be complicated or inconvenient. It can be very useful, for a number of reasons:

- ♥ **To give a picture of what your blood pressure is like as you go about your daily life**
- ♥ **To see if your blood pressure is higher in the clinic than it is at home**
- ♥ **To see for yourself how your treatment is working for you i.e. are lifestyle changes or medication having any effect on your blood pressure**
- ♥ **It can help with early diagnosis of high blood pressure, as blood pressure measured at a clinic setting is done occasionally**
- ♥ **To alert you/your GP to unexpected changes in your readings, helping them to make changes to or adjust your medication**
- ♥ **To help identify white coat hypertension - where the pressure is markedly higher due to anxiety about seeing a doctor**
- ♥ **To help pick out white coat effect - where the thought of a doctor or nurse measuring your blood pressure, even though you know you have raised blood pressure and may even be on treatment, will still raise it even higher**

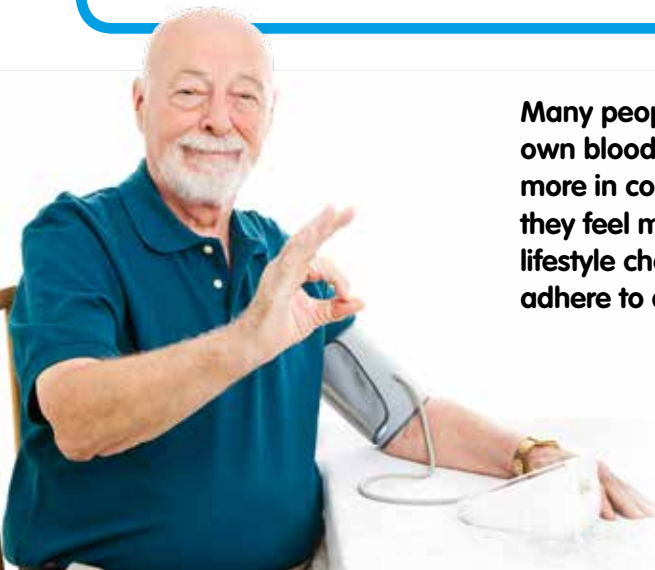
# Is measuring at home for you?

Measuring blood pressure at home can be very useful, and is now an important part of managing high blood pressure, but it is not for everyone. Some people become more anxious when they start measuring at home and end up taking readings far too often. If you feel anxious you can discuss this with your doctor or nurse first.

Before you decide to try measuring your blood pressure at home, ask yourself: is this going to make me feel more relaxed or more worried?

## Important

Home blood pressure monitoring is not suitable for people with pulse irregularities such as atrial fibrillation (AF), as this can affect the accuracy of the readings. Even experts have problems measuring accurate blood pressure on patients with an irregular heart beat. There are a few machines now available that have been designed to overcome this problem. You should discuss this with your doctor or nurse before buying a machine.



**Many people find that measuring their own blood pressure helps them feel more in control of their condition, as they feel more motivated to stick to the lifestyle changes they have made and adhere to any medication they are on.**

# Choosing the right monitor for you

If you do decide to measure your blood pressure at home, you will need to get a home blood pressure monitor. There is a wide range of home monitors available, but it is important to be sure that the monitor you choose is the right one for you.

## ✔ Choose the right type of monitor

There are many different kinds of blood pressure monitor, but it is easiest to use a monitor that is fully automatic. Choose one that measures your blood pressure at your upper arm, rather than your wrist or finger. Upper-arm monitors usually give the most accurate and consistent results.

## ✔ Make sure your monitor is accurate

Make sure that the monitor you choose has been 'clinically validated' for accuracy. This means that it has gone through a series of tests to make sure it gives results that you and your doctor can trust.



A list of clinically validated home blood pressure monitors can be obtained from the British and Irish Hypertension Society ([www.bihsoc.org](http://www.bihsoc.org)) or by contacting the Blood Pressure UK helpline on 020 7882 6218.

## ♥ Make sure you have the right cuff size

An upper-arm monitor will come with a cuff that you need to wrap around your arm. If you use a cuff that is the wrong size for you, your reading will not be correct. Measure around your upper arm at the midpoint between your shoulder and elbow, and choose your cuff size from the table below.

Most monitors will come with a medium sized cuff. You may have to order a different sized cuff separately. Please note that cuff sizes may vary slightly according to manufacturer.

Monitor cuff sizes		
Less than 18.5cm	7.1–8.7"	Small
18.5 – 25cm	8.8–12.8"	Medium
25 – 30cm	12.9–18"	Large *

\* Anything bigger than a large, you will need to contact the manufacturer for advice.

## ♥ Choose a monitor to suit your budget

Blood pressure monitors can vary in price from £30-£150. This usually depends on the number of extra features that a monitor has, like a built-in memory for example.

All you need to measure your blood pressure correctly is a clinically validated monitor, and a pen and paper to record your readings. Extra features can be helpful but they are not necessary and you don't have to buy expensive machines.

## ♥ Keep your monitor calibrated

Your blood pressure monitor will need to be re-calibrated at least once every two years to be sure it gives you accurate results. To have your monitor re-calibrated, you will need to send it back to the manufacturer. There will probably be a fee for this service.

# How to measure your own blood pressure

**There are a few simple steps that you can follow to be sure that you get an accurate measurement.**

## Before you take your reading

- 1 Many things can make your blood pressure rise for a short time. Make sure you do not need to use the toilet, and that you have not just eaten a big meal. Do not measure your blood pressure within 30 minutes of drinking caffeine or smoking, or immediately after exercise or drinking alcohol.
- 2 Wear loose-fitting clothes like a short sleeved t-shirt so that you can push your sleeve up comfortably.
- 3 Always use the same arm for readings, as each arm will give you a slightly different reading. If possible, use the arm that your doctor or nurse uses when measuring your blood pressure.
- 4 Before you take your readings, rest for a few minutes. You should be sitting down in a quiet place, preferably at a desk or table, with your arm resting, palm up, on a firm surface and your feet flat on the floor.
- 5 Make sure your arm is supported and that the cuff around your arm is at the same level as your heart. You may need to support your arm with a cushion to be sure it is at the correct height. Your arm should be relaxed, not tensed.



## Taking your reading

- 1 Put the cuff on following the instructions that come with your monitor.
- 2 Make sure you are relaxed and comfortable. If you are anxious or uncomfortable, this will make your blood pressure rise temporarily.
- 3 When you are taking your reading, keep still and silent. Moving and talking can affect your reading.
- 4 Take two or three readings, each about two minutes apart, and then work out the average. Some people find that their first reading is much higher than the next readings. If this is the case for you, keep taking readings until they level out and stop falling, then use this as your reading.
- 5 Record your reading, either in the memory of your monitor or on computer or paper. We have included a sample table at the end of this booklet, which you can use.

### **Do not round your measurements up or down**

If you don't keep accurate records of your blood pressure, this may affect the treatment you receive. e.g. if your blood pressure is 127/84 don't round to 130/80-90

### **Do not be alarmed if you get an unexpected high reading**

A one-off reading may be nothing to worry about. Measure your blood pressure again at another time, but if you find that it continues to be high after a period, see your doctor or nurse.

### **Don't check your blood pressure too often or you may become worried or stressed about small changes in your reading**

This can raise your blood pressure temporarily. Worrying about your blood pressure reading may actually make it higher.



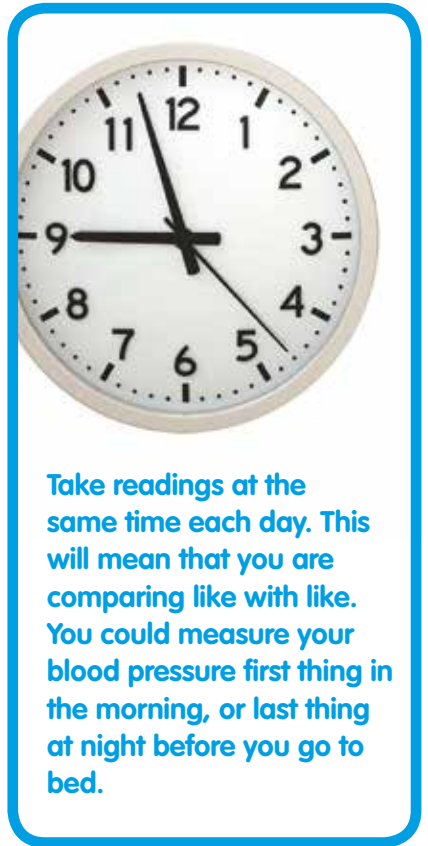
# When to measure your blood pressure

When and how often you take readings will depend on your blood pressure. Your doctor or nurse will be able to advise you. It can be useful to monitor your blood pressure closely at first, then less often but at regular intervals.

When you first start, measure your blood pressure morning and evening, every day for a week. Discard your first day's readings – they may not be accurate because you are not familiar with your monitor. At the end of the week you will have a useful picture of what your blood pressure is like normally. You can then take readings less often – once a week perhaps. Your doctor or nurse will be able to advise you.

At times, you may want to measure your blood pressure more regularly for a period. For example, if you are given a new medicine, or a higher dose of medicine, then you could measure your blood pressure over a few weeks to see if this is having any effect.

If you have a GP appointment coming up, ideally you should measure your BP 4-7 days prior to the appointment. Take 3 readings 1-2 minutes apart in the morning and evening. This will give your GP an overall picture of your blood pressure.



# Working with your doctor or nurse

A doctor or nurse will not usually make decisions about your treatment based only on readings you have taken at home. However, they may still find it useful to know what your blood pressure is like day to day, when you are away from the clinic.

Before you start to measure your blood pressure at home, talk to your doctor or nurse. They may be able to advise you on when to measure your blood pressure, or how often, and the ideal target blood pressure for you to aim for.

It can also be a good idea to bring your own monitor to the clinic or surgery so that your doctor or nurse can be confident that it is accurate, and that you are using it properly.

## Remember

**Agreeing with your doctor or nurse means that you will both be clear about what you are doing, and why.**

**While home blood pressure monitoring is a useful tool to keep an eye on your blood pressure in between consultations, it is not a substitute for clinic visits. Do not alter your medicine dosage or stop taking them without consulting the doctor or nurse.**





This booklet has been written to help you measure your blood pressure at home. Measuring at home can be a very useful way of learning more about your blood pressure, but it is easy to get confused about how to do it.

This booklet gives you clear instructions on how to get the most out of measuring your blood pressure at home. It gives you information on:

- 📍 **The pros and cons of measuring at home**
- 📍 **Choosing the right monitor**
- 📍 **How to get an accurate reading**
- 📍 **Working with your doctor or nurse**

The booklet has been written with help from people who have high blood pressure, and from professionals who are experts in the field. It has been designed to give you the information you need to make the right choices for you.

For more information, go to [www.bloodpressureuk.org](http://www.bloodpressureuk.org).

## About Blood Pressure UK

We are the UK's leading blood pressure charity - lowering the nation's blood pressure to prevent stroke, heart attack and heart disease. High blood pressure can be successfully treated and prevented. We are here to help.

For more information, please contact:

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