



YOUR HEART IS LISTENING: The Silent Issue That Shapes Your Health

Blood pressure describes the force of blood pushing against your blood vessel walls. When that force registers high for an extended period of time, it strains the heart and damages blood vessels.

Typically, people feel “fine” even when their numbers are high, which is why hypertension is regarded as the “silent killer.” Preventive blood pressure screening is vitally important for adults. Regular check-ups can help establish a baseline and identify any patterns of irregularity.

Understanding the Numbers

Blood pressure is shown as two numbers. Systolic, is the top number and measures the pressure when the heart pumps. Diastolic is the bottom number and measures pressure when the heart rests between beats.

General range for at-home blood pressure readings:

- Normal is less than 120 over less than 80
- Elevated is 120 to 129 over less than 80
- High blood pressure stage 1 is 130 to 139 over 80 to 89
- High blood pressure stage 2 is 140 or higher over 90 or higher

Consistent readings above 180 and or 120 signal an emergency, especially with symptoms that include chest pain, shortness of breath, weakness and possible changes in vision.

Take note, one high reading doesn’t equate to a hypertension diagnosis. However, it’s vital to document all readings and relay them to your physician. Tracking your blood pressure readings establishes a baseline for identifying irregular patterns and ultimately obtaining a proper diagnosis.

Know Your Numbers at Home

Home readings can be very useful, but small mistakes can change results. Here are a few simple steps improve accuracy:

START WITH THE RIGHT DEVICE

Upper arm cuffs tend to be more accurate than wrist cuffs for most people. A “validated” device is a smart choice because [Validate BP](#) provides a free listing supported by the [American Medical Association](#). The listing is a great resource for finding approved monitors that meet accuracy and industry standards.

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We’ve highlighted some resources you may want to look into further. Simply click or tap the icon or its hyperlink to access these select materials!

WEARABLES AND APPS CAN HELP



Utilizing technology for everything from tracking sleep, quantifying steps to monitoring heart rate, has become second nature. These devices support healthy habits, and they may help you stay consistent with goals. Review [ComPsych EAP](#) [handout](#) to learn the pros and cons of health and fitness devices; it's a helpful reminder to focus on accuracy, privacy, and lifestyle.

Smartwatches and “cuffless” tools may be on trend, however, they are not the most reliable for accurate blood pressure measurement. A validated cuff monitor remains the best option for at-home measurements. Pairing a cuff monitor with a phone app can be helpful, since apps archive readings, create charts, and make it easier to share results at medical visits. The key is using a [validated cuff device](#) for the most accurate reading.



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GETTING THE CUFF SIZE RIGHT

A cuff that is too small can generate a higher number; similarly, a cuff that's too large may generate a lower numerical reading. Therefore, be sure to measure your arm against the size range referenced on the box of the selected cuff.

TIMING IS KEY

Avoid smoking, ingesting caffeine, and exercising approximately 30 minutes before taking your blood pressure. It's recommended that you first use the restroom. Afterwards, meditate and sit quietly for at least five minutes, keeping your back supported, resting your feet flatly on the floor, and uncrossing the legs. Resting your arm on a flat surface or table ensures the cuff remains at heart level. Remaining still and quiet will help the monitor generate accurate results.

ONE READING IS NOT THE FULL STORY

Taking two readings at one-minute intervals, generates more precise measurements. Writing down the date, time, of all blood pressure measurements should be shared with your medical team.

Make it Easier with Benefits and Smart Planning

A blood pressure check is quick, and many people can get it during routine visits. Keeping up with preventive care visits also creates a natural moment

to talk about numbers, family history, stress, sleep, food, and movement.

A home blood pressure monitor may be an eligible expense under a Health Care FSA. Optum includes blood pressure monitors on [common eligible expense lists](#), and reimbursement guidance is available through [Optum resources](#).

A simple approach to checking blood pressure helps. Pick a time you can repeat, like mornings before work, and keep your monitor in a visible spot. A short routine is easier to maintain than a perfect plan you cannot stick with.

Physical activity supports blood pressure, circulation, and stress levels. The BCBSIL fitness program through [Well onTarget](#) can help you build a consistent routine. Great news! The \$25 enrollment fee is being waived for the entire month of February. Use the code FEB26FP when enrolling to receive the discount.

Benefit Resources

[BCBSIL](#) can help you find preventive care [CLICK OR TAP!](#) options, wellness programs, and tools to support heart health.

[Optum Financial](#) can help you understand [CLICK OR TAP!](#) FSA eligible purchases and the reimbursement process, including items like blood pressure monitors. Give your heart the attention it deserves this February! monitors. Give your heart the attention it deserves this February!



SOURCES: [US Preventive Services Task Force](#), [Heart.org](#)

Share this article with your colleagues so they too can get a jump on handling their blood pressure!