

How to Take Your Blood Pressure

For congenital heart patients

This section of the Congenital Heart Conditions notebook tells how and when to take your own blood pressure and how to record the reading.

Blood Pressure Machine:

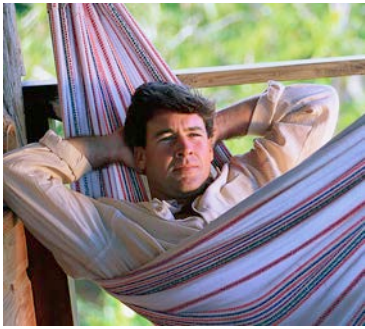
- Choose a blood pressure machine with an arm cuff, not a finger or wrist cuff.
- Make sure that the inflatable part of the cuff is at least as long as the widest part of your upper arm. The size and position of the cuff can affect how accurate the readings are. If the cuff is too large or too small, the readings will not be accurate.
- When you first get your machine, check how accurate it is by comparing its readings with readings that are taken at your doctor's office.
- Inspect your blood pressure cuff often to make sure the tubing, bulb, valve, and cuff are in good condition. Even a small hole or crack in the tubing can affect how accurate the readings are.



Choose a blood pressure machine with an arm cuff.

Taking Your Blood Pressure

- Take your blood pressure while you are sitting in a comfortable and relaxed position. Sit with your arm slightly bent and resting on a table so that your upper arm is at the same level as your heart.
- Wrap the blood pressure cuff snugly around your upper arm so that the lower edge of the cuff is 1 inch above the bend of your elbow. Do not put on the cuff over your shirtsleeve; put it on bare skin.
- Try not to move or talk while you are taking your blood pressure.
- Use the same arm every time you take your blood pressure. Your reading may be 10 to 20 points different between your right and left arms.



Plan to rest for at least 15 minutes before taking your blood pressure.

- Ask your heart doctor if your blood pressure in one of your arms tends to be inaccurate. Know which arm is accurate, and use that arm to check your blood pressure.
- Try to take your blood pressure at the same time every day. Blood pressure readings are usually highest in the morning after you wake up and move around. They decrease throughout the day and are lowest in the evening.
- When you take your blood pressure, you may feel discomfort when the cuff inflates and squeezes your arm.

What to Record

When you take your blood pressure, write down:

- Your *systolic* (the upper number) and *diastolic* (the lower number) pressures
- The date and time
- Which arm you used (right or left)
- Your position (sitting, lying down, or standing)
- Your heart rate (pulse), if your blood pressure machine also measures that

How to Get the Most Accurate Readings

To get the most accurate blood pressure readings:

- For at least 30 minutes before taking your blood pressure, **DO NOT**:
 - Eat
 - Use tobacco products
 - Take medicines that raise blood pressure
 - Exercise
- Plan to rest for at least 15 minutes before taking your blood pressure.
- Do not take your blood pressure when you are nervous or upset.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

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