

Checking 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.



Scan this QR code with your phone camera for a digital copy of this handout.

Blood Pressure Machines

- Choose a blood pressure machine with an arm cuff, not a finger or wrist cuff.
- Make sure that the inflatable part of the cuff easily fits around the widest part of your upper arm. If the cuff is too large or too small, the readings will not be accurate.



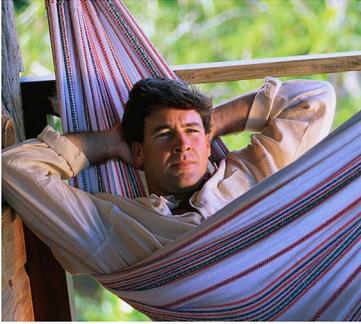
Choose a blood pressure machine with an arm cuff.

- 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. **You may also want to bring your cuff to every visit with our team, and check that it is accurate.**
- Inspect your blood pressure cuff often. 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.

How to Get the Most Accurate Readings

To get the most accurate blood pressure readings:

- 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.
- 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.

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. Your upper arm should be at the same level as your heart.
- Put the cuff on your bare skin. Do not put it on over a sleeve.
- Wrap the blood pressure cuff snugly around your upper arm. The lower edge of the cuff should be 1 inch above the bend of your elbow.
- 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.
- Ask your provider if your blood pressure in one of your arms tends not to be accurate. 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

Keep a log of this information. Bring it to your next visit or report your numbers to your ACHD team.

Questions?

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

Heart Institute Adult
Congenital Heart Disease
Program: 206.598.1764