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PATIENT HANDOUT · BLOOD PRESSURE

Blood Pressure at Home

Home readings show what your blood pressure does in daily life. How to choose a cuff, measure well and log a week.

7 days
of morning and evening readings before each visit

30 min
at least, without caffeine, exercise or nicotine before a reading

14 in
around the upper arm, about where you likely need a large cuff

WHY THE OFFICE NUMBER CAN MISLEAD

One reading in clinic versus a week of real life

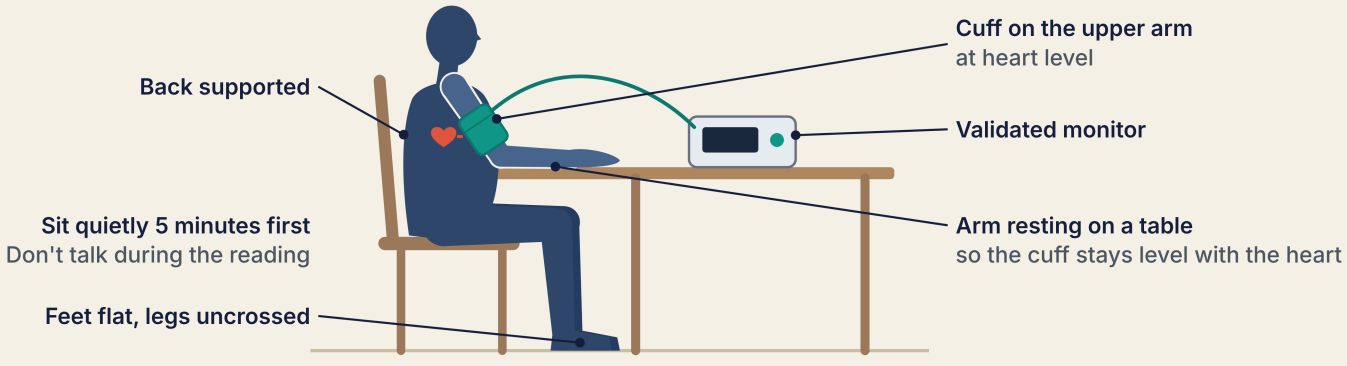
White coat hypertension
Between one in six and one in three people who read high in clinic have normal pressure at home.

Masked hypertension
Some people read normal in clinic and run high the rest of the time, often busy people who relax in the exam room.

Guidelines now treat home readings or a 24-hour monitor as the reference standard. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends confirming a new diagnosis outside the office before starting medication.

HOW TO MEASURE

Set up every reading the same way



Bring the log

Two readings each morning before coffee or medications and two each evening, for seven days. The weekly average is the number we treat. Once a day still helps if that's all you can manage.

YOUR HOME MONITORING GUIDE

Choosing a cuff and using it well

CHOOSING A CUFF

Upper-arm cuff	Use one on the upper arm. Wrist devices are much more sensitive to how you hold your arm, and their accuracy in real use is much worse.
Validated device	Check STRIDE BP or the Validated Device Listing for monitors that passed independent accuracy testing.
The right size	A cuff that's too small reads high, and one that's too large reads low. Above about 14 inches around the upper arm, you likely need a large cuff. Measure with a tape before you buy.
Memory or Bluetooth	Handy but not required, and a paper log works too.

EACH READING

At least 30 minutes before	No caffeine, exercise or nicotine.
Right before	Empty your bladder, then sit quietly for five minutes with your back supported.
During	Feet flat, legs uncrossed, arm resting so the cuff is at heart level. Don't talk.
Two readings	About a minute apart. Record both, and take a third if they're very different.

READING THE NUMBERS

One high reading	Everyone's pressure spikes after exercise, an argument or a stressful call, so trust the average over several days.
The weekly average	Set the first day aside, since it tends to run high, and average the rest.
Dose changes	Don't take an extra dose on your own, since it can cause more trouble than the high reading. If a reading worries you, call the office. With symptoms and a very high reading, call 911.

A READING ABOVE 180/120

With symptoms, call 911	Above 180 on top or above 120 on the bottom, with chest pain, shortness of breath, weakness or numbness, vision changes, confusion or a severe headache.
No symptoms	Sit quietly for 5 minutes and check again, then call the office the same day.

WHAT HOME READINGS CATCH

Timing problems, too. A morning dose that wears off by bedtime, or evening pills that fade by dawn, show up in a week of paired morning and evening readings. Two office visits a year can miss them entirely.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

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home-blood-pressure-monitoring

For education only, and not a substitute for advice from your own physician. Sources include the 2025 AHA/ACC blood pressure guideline, the 2021 USPSTF hypertension screening statement, the 2020 AHA/AMA policy statement on home monitoring and TASMINH4 (Lancet 2018).

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