

Checking Your Blood Pressure At Home



Checking your blood pressure at home can help you and your doctor manage high blood pressure.

What kind of equipment will I need?

When you and your doctor decide that you will begin checking your blood pressure at home, it is important to use an appropriate recommended device. Talk to your doctor about where you can buy the LifeSource 767 Home Blood Pressure Monitor. It is available at most Health Education centers and Kaiser Permanente pharmacies. Your local Health Education staff can demonstrate how to use the monitor and can also help to make sure that the cuff size on your home monitor fits you.

How do I measure my blood pressure correctly?

When measuring your blood pressure at home, you should:

- Wait 30 minutes after drinking caffeine, using tobacco products, or exercising before measuring blood pressure.
- Find a quiet environment, and make sure you are not talking or doing something else while taking your blood pressure.
- Rest five minutes before checking.
- Use the bathroom, if needed. Your blood pressure can go up when your bladder is full.
- Position the blood pressure cuff just above your elbow.
- Make sure that your arm is supported on the arm of a chair or on the surface of a table or desk.
- Make sure that your back is supported, your legs are not crossed, and your feet are on the floor.
- Wrap the cuff smoothly and snugly around your arm above your elbow. There should be enough room to slip one fingertip under the cuff.
- The bottom edge of the cuff should be 1 inch above the elbow crease. The tubing should be centered over the inside of your elbow.
- Do not use wrist or fingertip monitors. Wrist and fingertip monitors are not accurate.

Key points about Home Blood Pressure Monitoring

- If you have high blood pressure, do not adjust your prescribed medications yourself based on home readings. Review your readings with your physician. Changing or stopping your medications can result in serious side effects.

- Do not be too concerned with the normal changes in blood pressure throughout the day or from day to day. Caffeine, exercise, smoking, alcohol, and certain medications can influence your blood pressure readings. These variations are normal.

How important is any one home blood pressure reading?

The average of several readings is more meaningful than any one reading. Taking your blood pressure as little as twice a day on three separate days can give you enough information to calculate your average blood pressure. Make sure that at least half of the readings you take are between 6 and 10 AM, because that is when blood pressure is highest for most people.

If the first reading is high (**135/85 or higher**), wait one minute and then check again. If two readings are taken one minute apart, use the lowest reading when calculating the average.

What should I do with the home blood pressure readings?

Record your home blood pressure readings in a log (such as the Home Blood Pressure Log), or make your own blood pressure log in a notebook or spreadsheet. If you decide to make your own log, make sure to include:

- The date you took the reading
- The time of day when you took the reading
- Your blood pressure reading
- Any notes (such as whether you were feeling stressed, tired, or sick for any reason)

Having this information written down allows you to calculate your average blood pressure to share with your doctor and keep for your records.

Example Blood Pressure Log:

Date	Time	Blood Pressure	Notes
09/07/12	7:03 AM	135/84	
09/07/12	5:30 PM	136/86	
09/10/12	7:10 AM	130/82	Got a good night's sleep
09/10/12	6:05 PM	133/84	
09/12/12	7:20 AM	129/80	
09/12/12	5:45 PM	140/87	Stressful day at work

How do I calculate my average home blood pressure?

$$\text{Average blood pressure} = \frac{\text{Total systolic blood pressure / total number of readings}}{\text{Total diastolic blood pressure / total number of readings}}$$

1. Add the **systolic** blood pressure (the top number, e.g. **130/80**) for at least six separate readings on at least three separate days.
Example: 135 + 136 + 130 + 133 + 129 + 140 = 803
Divide that total number by the **number of readings** you measured.
Example: 803 / 6 days = **133.8**

Divide that total number by the **number of readings** you measured.

Example: 503 / 6 days = **83.8**

3. Your average blood pressure is the end number from step 1 over the end number from step 2.
Example: **133.8 / 83.8** = Average home blood pressure

2. Add the **diastolic** blood pressure (the bottom number, e.g. **130/80**) for those same separate readings.
Example: 84 + 86 + 82 + 84 + 80 + 87 = 503

How do I know if my blood pressure is under control?

The blood pressure readings people take at home are usually lower than

the blood pressure readings people take at the office. Home blood pressure is considered controlled if your average home blood pressure is 134/84 or lower. If your average home blood pressure is above 134/84, talk to your doctor or go to kp.org/mydoctor to learn more about how to lower your blood pressure.

When to call for help right away

If your blood pressure is 180/110 or higher, call the nurse advice line.

If you have any of the following warning signs of a heart attack, call 911:

- Discomfort, pressure, heaviness or tightness in the chest for more than 10 minutes.
- Pain that spreads to the upper back, neck, shoulders, jaw or arms.
- Dizziness, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

These symptoms are not always present and at times they may go away and then return.

If you have any of the following warning signs of a stroke, call 911:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm and/or leg on one side of the body.
- Loss of speech or trouble talking or understanding people.
- Dimness or loss of vision, particularly in only one eye.
- Sudden, severe, unexplained headache.
- Unsteadiness or sudden falls, especially along with any of the previous symptoms.

Additional resources

- Connect to our website at **kp.org** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to **ndvh.org**.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.