

The lowdown on high blood pressure



Because half of American adults suffers from high blood pressure, regular and accurate blood pressure checks are important for correctly diagnosing and treating hypertension (the medical term for high blood pressure).



Three groups of people who may want to consider checking blood pressure on their own, in addition to having it measured at their annual physical exam.

- The first is those with “white-coat hypertension.” These are patients who get so worked up about being in a doctor’s office that their readings will always be high there.
- The second is those who already take medication to control their blood pressure and need to monitor how it’s working.
- The third is those who suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes or high cholesterol or who have risk factors such as obesity, smoking, or family history of hypertension.

Whether a blood pressure check is done at the doctor’s office or at home, it’s important to follow the same procedure:

- Avoid exercising, eating, drinking caffeine, or smoking for 30 minutes before.
- Sit in a chair with a straight back, with both feet flat on the floor. Your legs should not be crossed.
- Make sure your arm is supported on something such as a table or armrest with your palm up.
- Don’t take a measurement with the cuff placed on top of clothing. Bare skin is best.
- Wait 5 minutes after sitting down before you take your measurement.
- Take 2 to 3 measurements 1 minute apart to confirm your initial results.
- Take the measurements at the same time of day.
- Record your results to spot patterns.

