



## Taking Blood Pressure Readings in the Home: Important Considerations April 7, 2015

Checking your blood pressure is an important part of managing high blood pressure (hypertension). Blood pressure monitors can be purchased without a prescription; therefore home monitoring is an easy step that can be taken to improve an individual's condition. It is important that caretakers know the right technique for taking blood pressure and that they understand the readings.

### Understand the Readings.

It is important that anyone who takes blood pressure readings understands what the readings mean. It is not sufficient to take the blood pressure and record it. If the blood pressure is **too high or too low** it may be a sign of a medical condition that **requires immediate attention**.

Here's what you need to know if you are taking someone's blood pressure:

- The **top number is called Systolic BP**- it measure the pressure in the arteries when the heart contracts.
- The **bottom number is called the Diastolic BP** it measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart rests.
- Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg (systolic pressure is 120 AND diastolic pressure is less than 80).
- If a reading is high. Have the person relax for a few minutes and try again.

If the repeat blood pressure reading shows a systolic (top number) of **160 or higher** OR diastolic (bottom number) of **100 or higher**, **call the individuals physician**.

**If the reading is greater than or equal to 180/110, call 911.**

### How to Take Blood Pressure in the Home

To get the most accurate blood pressure readings at home, follow these steps:

- **Make sure the cuff fits.**  
Measure around your upper arm and choose a monitor that comes with the correct size cuff.
- **Be still.**  
Don't smoke, drink caffeinated beverages or exercise within the 30 minutes before measuring your blood pressure.
- **Sit correctly.**  
Sit with your back straight and supported (on a dining chair, for example, rather than a sofa). Your feet should be flat on the floor; don't cross your legs. Your arm should be supported on a flat surface (such as a table) with the upper arm at heart level. Make sure the middle of the cuff



# Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services

is placed directly above the eye of the elbow. Check your monitor's instructions for an illustration or have your healthcare provider show you how.

- **Take multiple readings.**  
Each time you measure, take two or three readings one minute apart and record all the results.
- **Measure at the same time daily.**  
It's important to take the readings at the same time each day, such as morning and evening, or as your healthcare professional recommends.
- **Accurately record all your results.**  
Record all of your readings, including the date and time taken. Share your blood pressure records with your healthcare team. Some monitors have built-in memory to store your readings; if yours does, take it with you to your appointments. Some monitors may also allow you to upload your readings to a secure Web site after you register your profile.
- **Understand the readings.**  
Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg (systolic pressure is 120 AND diastolic pressure is less than 80).
- **Consult your healthcare professional if you get several high readings.**  
A single high reading of blood pressure is not an immediate cause for alarm. However, if you get a high reading, take your blood pressure several more times and consult your healthcare professional to make sure you (or your monitor) don't have a problem. When blood pressure reaches a systolic (top number) of 180 or higher OR diastolic (bottom number) of 110 or higher, emergency medical treatment is required for hypertensive crisis.

**The most important things to remember are Right Size Cuff, Right Cuff Placement, Right Understanding of Results, Right Recording and Reporting.**

Source:

[http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/SymptomsDiagnosisMonitoringofHighBloodPressure/How-to-Monitor-and-Record-Your-Blood-Pressure\\_UCM\\_303323\\_Article.jsp#.WDMiZ\\_6Qzml](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/SymptomsDiagnosisMonitoringofHighBloodPressure/How-to-Monitor-and-Record-Your-Blood-Pressure_UCM_303323_Article.jsp#.WDMiZ_6Qzml)

Updated: November 2016